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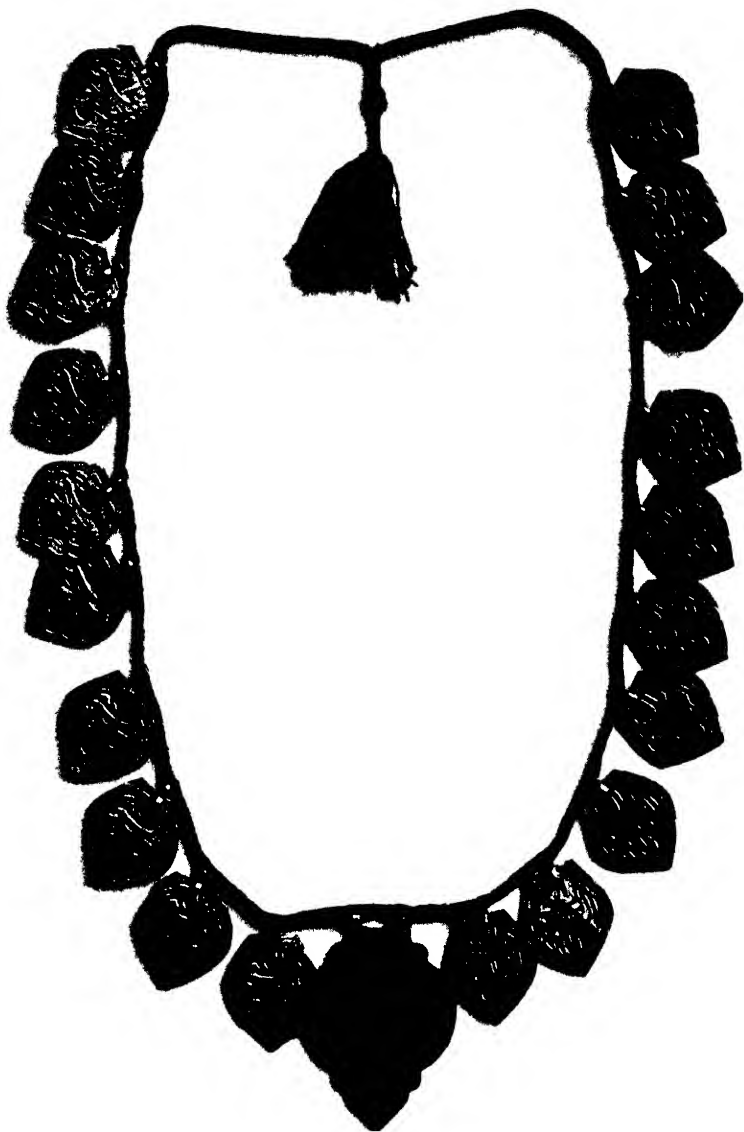
# **THE WILD RUE**

**A STUDY OF MUHAMMADAN MAGIC AND FOLKLORE  
IN IRAN**









**BISMI LLAHI R RAHMANI RAHIMI**

In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate (See p. 25)

Frontispiece

# THE WILD RUE

A STUDY OF MUHAMMADAN MAGIC  
AND FOI KLORE IN IRAN

BY

BESS ALLEN DONALDSON

MESHED IRAN



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## PREFACE

THE present ruler of Iran, Shah Reza Pahlavi, has brought about tremendous changes in the laws and customs of the country. Some of these measures have operated directly against superstitious practices and outworn ideas that have prevailed for generations. With the remarkable increase in the number of schools for both boys and girls, the amazing development of the public press, the establishment of Government hospitals in the principal cities throughout the country, the founding of a university with departments for professional and technical training in Teheran, the maintenance of motor highways, the building of railroads, and above all the emancipation of the women of Iran from the degrading Muhammadan veil—all these reforms bespeak the progress and enlightenment that His Majesty earnestly desires for his people.

This book represents the old life, with its fears and superstitions, which, happily, are now beginning to pass away. Most of the material has been collected within the province of Khorasan, but since pilgrims come to the "sacred city" of Meshed from all over Iran, many of them to remain for the rest of their lives, its population is after all a representative group. Many of the women from whom information has been obtained were originally from Kerman, Yezd, Isfahan and Teheran, as well as from many villages in the vicinities of these cities, others, in smaller numbers, have come from Hamadan, Resht, and Tabriz.

While most of the objective instances and illustrations have been given by the middle and lower classes, yet no class of people has been omitted. The educated and the wealthy, as well as the illiterate and the poor, have made their contributions, and although most of the information has been provided by women, yet there is much also that men have added that has been of value. Some of those who are more highly educated will very likely contend that these beliefs belong now to the past, and it is a pleasure to admit that this



may be true as far as they themselves are concerned, and for the small group they represent, but unfortunately this could not as yet be said of the great mass of the people

The famous old book by Kazwini, the *Ajayib al Makhhlukat*, or "The Wonders of Creation," which was completed in A D 1363, is still highly esteemed by the middle and lower classes. Many of the current ideas that have to do with magic and folklore are found in this book, as well as in more recent popular manuals to which occasional references are made in the text. The beliefs and practices which are called "authentic" are those whose sanction can be found either in the Koran or in the accepted traditions concerning the teaching and example of the Prophet Muhammad, or they may be traced to one or the other of his spiritual successors and representatives on earth, the "Twelve Imams"

As will be shown, many of these traditions are fantastic, and extravagant, so much so indeed that many present day people no longer have faith in them and often ridicule them. Undoubtedly there are stories believed and customs retained by the ignorant that are no longer countenanced by the educated, yet it is important to recognize what a vital significance they have for those who know no better

Considerable attention has been given to religious customs, this is because the superstitions are firmly rooted in the religion. With the majority of the people their occult practices have become religious rites. It is to them that they pin their faith, and to them they turn in times of trial and crisis. While the name of God is often upon their lips, all too frequently it, too, is merely a name with which to conjure

The uninformed mind turns very naturally to something tangible in times of need. They are surrounded by fears, fears of sickness and death, fears of drought and crop failure, fears of famine and flood, fears of evildoers and their wiles, fears of husbands and their relatives, and all kinds of fears of the supernatural, and in their ignorance they have but sought the help of some "magical power" in strange objects or symbols

There is no need to ask why magic and sorcery have been so generally practised in Iran. Only recently have there been schools for the ordinary boys, and still more recently for the girls, but ten years ago a speaker was expelled from the pulpit in the Shrine of the Imam Rida in Meshed because

he advocated education for girls. He was accused of striking at the very foundation of the faith, when he insisted that women should be educated, and all this time that the untutored minds of the masses have been in ignorance, they have been diligently exploited by hundreds of "prayer-writers," diviners and sorcerers.

There has been no attempt to make this book exhaustive in a scientific sense, only a sufficient number of instances have been given under the different headings to make the treatment of the subject typical and popularly interesting. There has of necessity been occasional overlapping in presenting the various chapters. Jinn play a part at birth. The Koran touches all beliefs. The evil eye influences every phase of life, so there cannot be distinct lines drawn, all of which goes to show how completely these practices and beliefs colour the lives of the people.

For the facility of the general reader there is no attempt made in the text itself to employ accents and special marks to indicate the exact spelling of Arabic and Persian names and terms, but in expressions that are given in italics, in the names of authorities and books that are referred to in the Notes, and also in the Index, the ordinary requirements for transliteration are observed.

BESS ALLEN DONALDSON



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# THE WILD RUE

## CHAPTER I

### THE EVIL EYE

THE Iranians have a tradition which says that the evil eye puts the camel into the pot and mankind into the grave<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly fear of the evil eye exerts the greatest influence of all the superstitions that are common among the people Their ordinary conversations are interspersed with *Ma sha'llah* and *In sha'llah*, "What God wills" and "If God wills" These expressions are used to protect themselves against the evil that may lurk behind a remark of appreciation or admiration When they speak of illness, such words as *nazar*, "a spell cast by a malignant eye," *chashm zakhm*, the "eye that wounds," and *chashm zadah*, "struck by the evil eye," are frequently used because so much of their illness is attributed to this influence

But what is it that they regard as the evil eye? Those who have proffered information agree that it is a power in some eyes to bring evil to whatever they look upon These eyes are variously described as *chashm shur*, the "salty eye", *chashm zakhm*, the "eye that wounds", and *chashm tang*, the "narrow eye" This last term refers to the eye that casts a spell through covetousness

The majority of the common people hold all of the general beliefs regarding the evil eye, but there are others who acknowledge only those which can be traced to the Koran, or to one of the Prophets, or to one of the Imams They find their chief authority in Sura 68-51 "Almost would the infidels strike thee down with their very looks when they hear the warning of the Koran, and they say, He is certainly possessed"

There is a story that at the time of Muhammad a woman from an opposing faction attempted to bring calamity upon him She tied seven knots in a piece of rope and on each of

these she blew her breath. She hoped by this magical rite to ruin his influence among men and to bring to naught all his efforts. The rope and its intended use were discovered, and then it was that the *chahar kaul*, "four promises," were revealed to Muhammad,<sup>2</sup> so that he might not fear such women, but put his trust in God. Naturally these four suras are considered most efficacious against the evil eye. They are written and worn by anyone who thinks he has fallen under the spell of evil, or they are read repeatedly until the effects of the evil are removed.

The use of talismans against the evil eye was permitted by the Prophet. Asma', the daughter of Umais, relates "When I said to him, O Prophet, the family of Ja'far are afflicted by the baneful influence of an evil eye, may I use spells for them or not?" then he replied, Yes, for if there were anything in the world which would overcome Fate, it would be an evil eye."<sup>3</sup>

The measure that is often employed to ward off the evil eye is to utter *Ma sha'llah*, "What God wills!" The authority for its use is found in Sura 18:37 "And why didst thou not say, when thou enteredst thy garden, 'What God wills'?" There is no power but in God." All complimentary remarks should be prefaced by this expression, and failure to say it before admiring or praising a child will certainly be considered to be the cause of any illness or misfortune which may befall it in the near future.

When a person speaks of his intention to do something, he has no right to make a simple, direct statement, he must say *In sha'llah*, "If God wills," for the future is with God. To omit this would very likely result in the failure of the undertaking. The authority for this precaution is found in Sura 18:23 "Say not thou of a thing, 'I will surely do it tomorrow,' without saying, 'If God wills'." As Rodwell has remarked, "Muhammad had omitted this qualifying statement when, in reply to the Jews who had asked for the history of the seven sleepers, he simply promised to give it on the morrow,"<sup>4</sup> but we find it explicitly enjoined by example in Sura 12:100, where we read, "And when they came unto Joseph, he took his parents to him and said, 'Enter ye Egypt, if God will, secure'."

The Koran further suggests the advisability of avoiding circumstances which would cause wonder or surprise. When

Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for corn, according to Sura 12 67, he advised them "O my sons! enter not by one gate, but enter by different gates. Yet can I not help you against aught decreed by God." The shaikh who furnished the information regarding this verse explained that eleven grown sons of one father would arouse admiration anywhere. He added that Iranians, to avoid being too conspicuous, will not go in groups, but will separate and go singly or two by two, so as not to excite wonder. They are alarmed when people are surprised on account of a large family or great wealth or large flocks. It is at such times that covetousness and jealousy, with their "narrow eye" and "short glance," enter with dire results. If one is dressed attractively when he goes into the street he is in danger, therefore, before going out, he should read two of the four promises,<sup>5</sup> so as to protect himself from the possible evil.

There are, however, many verses from the Koran which are believed to afford protective power against the evil eye. Two that are widely used are Sura 10 81, "And when they had cast them down, Moses said, 'Verily God will render vain the sorceries which ye have brought to pass. God prospecteth not the work of evildoers,'" and Sura 12 65, "And when they opened their goods and found their money had been returned to them, they said, O our Father, what more can we desire? Here is our money returned to us, we will provide corn for our families, and will take care of our brother, and shall receive a camel's burden more of corn. This is an easy quantity!" These and many other verses are mentioned in the numerous books of magic that are in general use.

It matters little by what name this baneful influence is called, everyone knows exactly what is meant, but all do not agree as to the way the power is exerted. Some say that the power of the look alone is but slight, and that words must accompany the look to make it really dangerous. Others claim that the evil is in the glance, and that the accompanying remark only tends to increase or lessen its malignancy.

The possessor of an evil eye may or may not know that he has it. He may have been born with it, in which case it is because of the sign of the zodiac into which he was born, or because of the star that was rising at the hour of his birth. It exists in various degrees of power in different people. It is said by some, however, that there are few who actually



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do have it, and that perhaps most of them do not realize that it is in their possession. One Shaikh expressed the opinion that most of the fear of the evil eye has been created by the imaginations of the people, and that the real causes for it are not nearly so numerous as they think, but the fear of it is certainly general, and so many ills and misfortunes are ascribed to it, that most people have been suspected at some time of being the cause of calamities that have come to those with whom they have had contact.

If a person knows that he has the power of casting a spell he may be able to control it, for he can then gauge it according to his desires. Should it, however, be so strong that he cannot direct it, his only escape, if he be moved by kindness, is to avoid looking at anything that is beautiful or striking in any way, so as to remove the possibility of danger. There are but few, whether among the upper or lower classes, who do not have a dread of the look of admiration.

There is a man in Meshed who claims to know that he has this uncontrollable power in his eye. He warns people not to bring anything which is good or beautiful into his presence. He is generally shunned, for people think that if there is such danger when he is in a sympathetic frame of mind, what might he not be able to do in anger or jealousy!

To instance a particular woman, also of this city, who has claimed to have the ability to cast spells, one incident will illustrate how she has sometimes employed this power or art to her own advantage. As she was going out of her house to the public bath, she noticed a fat sheep that belonged to a neighbour who lived in the same courtyard. Jokingly she said, "Have some soup from that sheep ready when I come home and I'll help you eat it," and with a laugh she passed into the narrow street. Shortly after she had gone, the animal, when nibbling the leaves from a small mulberry tree that grew in the yard, got its head caught in a sickle that had been hung on one of the branches. In its struggle to get free, its throat was cut and it soon bled to death. When the woman returned, after the usual several hours at the bath, the soup was ready.

There is a well-known story of a shopkeeper who said to his apprentice, when a caravan of camels was passing his shop, "Go and buy some of the meat of that camel," indicating a particular animal. The boy took the money and followed

the caravan When they reached the place of loading and unloading, near the city gate, the animal fell down and died The boy rushed up to buy the meat The camel driver asked him who had sent him to buy meat, and the boy replied that his master had sent him The camel driver asked to be shown the master's shop The boy led him to the shop and as soon as he saw the shopkeeper he said *Chashm bash'* which, idiomatically translated, is equivalent to "What eyes!" The shopkeeper's eyes burst from their sockets and fell to the ground! Evidently the camel driver's eyes possessed more of the evil power than his

Another story tells of a man with an evil eye over which he had no control Some of his acquaintances were digging a well, and they struck a stone which they could neither dig through nor break One of them remembered the power of this man's eye and went to him, asking him to come and see the strange stone they had found in their digging When they showed him the unusual hardness of the stone by striking it with their picks, he remarked, "That is a remarkable stone," and immediately it cracked in several places The workmen then went on with their work and removed the stone piece by piece

Much as the women of Iran love to adorn themselves and to look attractive, yet they are in fact afraid of admiration A charming lady took her small daughter to enroll her in a school After all the arrangements had been made, one of the older students was asked to show her over the school building As they descended the stairs, she caught her heel on a step and fell Her face and arm were bruised, but they were promptly cared for by the Principal and the visitor seemed to be grateful for the solicitation that had been shown As she left the building, however, she told the student that she couldn't think of sending her daughter to that school, because her fall had been the result of the evil eye It would be too dangerous to leave an attractive child in a place where it was so evident that the evil influence was working

Evil results may follow at once, as in the above cases, and there are some who claim that people have fallen dead immediately when looked upon, but the power may also work slowly, as in the following instance The child concerned was a little boy who was strikingly beautiful and the most attractive in any group Iranian women of the middle and lower classes

almost always take their babies with them when they go calling. This mother realized the danger to her child and had named him *Ma sha'llah*, thus every time his name was spoken he would be protected from harm. One day a woman took him in her arms and fondled him rather extravagantly, but did not mention his name, so a few days later the child was stricken with fever. Every known charm was used for his recovery but day by day he grew worse. The mother then took him to several doctors but all to no avail, and at last the child died. Ever afterwards the mother spoke of him as her child who was given the evil eye by a jealous woman who would not speak his name.

Women often say that their children are ugly or that they are not very smart, when it is evident that they are unusually pretty and bright. They will deliberately allow attractive children to go unwashed to make them unattractive, or they sometimes give the names of animals to especially clever children, thinking that by calling a child 'Donkey' it will be kept from harm. If a precocious child has done intelligent or amusing things, the very superstitious mother will spit upon it. Spitting is believed to overcome the evil consequences of admiration, for the Prophet spat upon Ali when he sent him forth to fight the *devha* or demons. If a child has been greatly admired, a piece of the admirer's garment will be requested and will be pinned upon the child's clothing as a talisman.

When a family moves into a new house they should by all means give a party to their friends, or better than that, they should sacrifice an animal and give the meat to the poor and spread the blood of the victim over the door. This will protect them from admiration or jealousy. 'Your eyes to the soles of your feet, say *Ma sha'llah*,' is commonly said to a person who has admired something and has not protected it. If, however, one wishes to express praise, he may do so safely by first saying *Allah akbar*, "God is great"<sup>6</sup>

Covetousness is feared as much as admiration or surprise, and is held to be responsible for as much bad fortune. Special circumstances seldom fail to cause anxiety. One of two or more wives of the same man may be childless and may look upon the child of her *vasni* or rival wife with such longing that she is feared, and any illness the child may have will probably be blamed upon her, or a woman has a frail

child while her neighbour's baby is robust, and the latter fears the look of her neighbour upon her healthy child. Likewise any misfortune which may come to the child will be attributed to the look of longing or covetousness of the mother of the frail child. A man may own an animal that is in excellent condition, a donkey, a sheep or a cow, and is constantly uneasy for fear some one will cast a look of desire for possession upon his healthy animal. To protect it an iron key will be tied to a cow's horn, or a blue bead or a cowry shell will be fastened around the neck of a donkey or into the wool of a sheep. A tree bearing choice fruit may become the cause of envy, and lest evil come upon it and its fruit fall or become wormy, or lest it be injured by hail, the owner will bind a prayer, which is usually a verse from the Koran, to one of its branches, and while a courtyard that can boast a well of clear, cold water is much to be desired, yet its owner may not be at ease, for he has a neighbour who owns a well of hard, bad tasting water. Lest his good well fail as a result of his neighbour's covetousness, he will throw a written prayer into it and try to cease his worry. And beautiful girls especially when they become brides, may be looked upon in a way that is dangerous by mothers who have less comely daughters or by other girls who are not so favoured. Should oriental boils or smallpox, if they have thus far escaped, mar their beauty with lasting scars, it would be on account of some spell cast upon them, consequently each one will wear about her neck a tiny Koran in a golden box. Also women who weave the cord shoes that are commonly worn in dry weather are so afraid to have their work praised that they seldom make the two shoes alike. One is almost always a trifle smaller than its mate, and this is to avoid perfection, in fact it is not uncommon to find in rugs, even in those of superior quality, some slight irregularity in pattern or colour. The weaver has done this intentionally so that the article may be considered imperfect, for the evil eye is believed to be strongly drawn to perfection and with disastrous results.

As has been suggested perhaps the Iranians do not restrict themselves to the preventive and protective measures that are found in the Koran and in the Traditions. They have worked out many devices to meet their especial needs. Something rare or strange, something that bears a resemblance to an eye and attracts their attention, sooner or later becomes

a talisman Some of the most common of these charms are shells, stones, mother of pearl, and various parts of animals

Cowry shells are frequently observed This shell is called *bibin tarak* (eye cracker) One of them may be sewn to a child's garment, and it is often the only visible charm, or great numbers of them may be sewn in patterns onto the tape or leather bands that are used in the trappings of animals When the eye of envy or admiration is cast upon the wearer, these innocent looking decorations have the power to cast back the evil upon the dangerous eye and *cause it to crack* !

The agate stone, in the form of beads, bars, or ring settings, is considered to be highly effective against this evil power A bead of grey agate performs the same services as the cowry shell Long bars, with holes drilled in them, are strung or tied onto the necklaces of charms, which are still frequently seen on village women A piece of agate will be cut so that the layers of colour form a series of circles so as to resemble an eye This is a common type of jewelry Rings and other ornaments that are fastened to necklaces are often set with these polished agates The onyx is called *baba gauri*, "father of avarice," and is considered to be extremely dependable to send back the evil glance

Mother of pearl is also thought to possess power against the evil influence It is generally cut into fancy shapes, a fish a tooth, or a dagger, and it is worn for ornamentation as well as protection, and a panther's claw is used by many to ward off the evil power Pieces of the horn or of the skin of the deer are also regarded as exceedingly potent Deer skin is used instead of paper or cloth on which to write prayers, but the dried eye of a sacrificed sheep<sup>7</sup> is of all things the most highly esteemed, for almost invariably one dangles from the cap or shoulder of the Iranian baby, and some say that if the eye has been stolen from another woman's baby's cap, then its effectiveness is enhanced

Incantations play an important part in the efforts to remove the influence of the evil eye When an afflicted person is thought to be a victim of *nazar*, or the glance of the evil eye, a particular kind of incense, which is made of seeds of the wild rue, mixed with leaves of myrtle and frankincense, is burned at sunset, and while the smoke is curling about the head of the victim, the following incantation is repeated



#### CHARMS AGAINST THE EVIL EYE

Observe particularly the dried eye of the sacrificed sheep (upper centre) and the onyx eye in the pendant



When the lye is all powdered it is put into a vessel, when it is mixed with vinegar and placed upon the roof, where the stars may shine upon it. In the morning some of this mixture is poured over the head of the one who is thought to be under the spell, a drop is also given him to drink, and some is sprinkled on the wall nearby, and all the while the person who is performing the rite keeps reciting

Whoever cast the spell  
I have made it vain

If, however, the evil influence does not yield to any of the foregoing measures, a shaving may be taken from the door that leads to the street. This is bound with seven pieces of blue homespun cloth. One piece is used for each of seven persons who may possibly have cast the spell of the evil eye. This shaving is then burned along with the seeds of the wild rue. With the ashes spots are made between the eyes, on the palms of the hands, and on the soles of the feet of the victim, while the following words are spoken

In sha llah raf i nazar shudah

God willing the spell has been removed

Ordinarily there is apt to be only a suspicion that the attack of illness is the result of a spell, but there are several methods of determining whether or not a spell has actually been cast. Until the complete removal of the veil in 1936, the following simple method was much used by the women. If a woman repeated one of the verses of the Koran which had been previously mentioned, she would stretch out her arm to the corner of her head-kerchief. If the arm and kerchief would prove to be of the same length, then no spell had been cast. If, however, they should be uneven in length, then this is a sure sign that evil has been done. If the arm should stretch farther, then a woman is the evil doer, but if the kerchief should be longer, then the witchcraft has been performed by a man.

When it has been proved that the evil eye has been given, steps may be taken to detect the guilty person. A common expedient is to hold an egg between the two palms and to press upon it as the name of each suspect is spoken. At the name of the guilty one the egg will break.

Another method is as follows. A conjecture is made as to

the probable time the spell was cast, then there is an effort to recall everyone who was present on that occasion. When this has been done, someone procures a brick, then dips her finger into castor oil and makes as many oil spots on the brick as there were people present at that time. She speaks the name of each one with great solemnity as she makes each mark, then she puts a burned match on each corner of the brick, and in the centre she places a piece of new cotton, a crystal of rock candy, some salt, an egg, and again the seeds of the wild rue. Now the brick is taken carefully, with all these things upon it, to some place where roads cross, and it is left there. When the woman who took away the brick returns from her errand, her confederates inquire, "Salam, where have you been?" She replies, "I have been to the house of an enemy." "What did you do there?" they ask. "I saw him die and I buried him," she says.

The idea is that by this ceremony the evil is made to return upon the doer and at the same time it reveals who did it, while in the meantime the victim of the glance is left to recover. But there is scarcely any limit to the variety of beliefs and practices that are connected with the evil eye,<sup>9</sup> the whole conception has for so long a time dominated the daily life and thought of the people.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Majlisi *Hilyatu l Muttakin* p 88

Koran Suras 109 112 113 114

<sup>3</sup> Hughes Dictionary of Islam quoted from the *Mishkat* book xxi, ch 1 part 2

<sup>4</sup> Rodwell's translation of the Koran, p 182, note 3

<sup>5</sup> Majlisi *Hilyatu l Muttakin* p 88

<sup>6</sup> Majlisi *op cit*

<sup>7</sup> Cf Index, Sacrifices on *Aid i Kurban*

<sup>8</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada*, p 24 The Five are Muhammad Ali Fatima Hasan and Husain Cf Chapter V

<sup>9</sup> Cf Westermarck Ritual and Beliefs in Morocco vol 1 ch viii which gives a comprehensive account of these practices in other countries

## CHAPTER II

### PRACTICES AT CHILD BIRTH

UNDER a system where easy divorce has long been taken for granted, and where one of the reasons for divorce has been the failure to bear children, women have resorted to numerous expedients to produce offspring. Happy indeed is the woman who presents her husband with a son. Sorely anxious is she who does not find herself expectant, and she who has lost her child thinks continually of the possibility of bearing another, accordingly, many are the efforts put forth by women in their desperation.

In ancient times, when a great leader returned victorious from a war it was the custom to cut out a stone lion and set it up in commemoration of the triumph. Near Hamadan there is one of these lions, and some years ago there was another that lay outside one of the city gates of Meshed, but recently this latter lion, now much mutilated, was tumbled into a pit which was filled up in the course of street construction. Childless women had often visited this stone, to pour oil upon it and to walk or crawl under it, hoping that by so doing they might become pregnant. In Teheran there is an old cannon, called the pearl cannon, under which women will walk for the same purpose.

Numerous rites are observed by such women at cemeteries. On the last Wednesday before the Iranian New Year, a woman will take seven walnuts, seven almonds, seven leek leaves, and seven coloured threads. She will break the walnuts and almonds and scatter them with the leek leaves upon the ground for others to pick up and eat. She will tie the threads to her great toe and then cut them. This performance is considered effective in producing pregnancy.

Similarly a woman who desires a child will take with her to the bath a copper or brass bowl, to which are fastened forty keys. She fills this forty times and empties it each time over her head. A turtle's shell may be used instead of the bowl.

Another practice in the bath is to take up the waste water, a double handful from each corner of the room, and put it into a bowl. This done, she faces Mecca, puts a short handled broom, which is made of desert weed, on her head, and then she pours the water over the broom. She goes then to a young mother who has a very young baby and says, 'Salaam!' The idea is to take unto herself the young mother's ability and probability of bearing more children, and this would leave the young mother sterile. So general is this belief that at times the young mother who is so addressed will immediately become hysterical.

Within the sacred area of the Shrine of the Imam Rida in Meshed there is a stone which is said to be the one upon which the body of that saint was washed for burial. Over this stone childless women pour water, and catch it again in a bowl as it drips from the corners through grooves that have been cut for the purpose. This water they will keep, to drink some of it from time to time to insure pregnancy.

A very common belief is that there is a *bacha khawr*, 'baby eater,' in the uterus of a barren woman. It is said to be something like a fish in appearance. They think, however, that it dies after eating an embryo. In order to get rid of this baby eater there are particular practices to perform or potions to drink.

In the belief that it may cause her to have a child, sometimes a woman will deliberately step over a carcass. Charms of many kinds are also worn for this purpose. The majority of these are made of a couple of coriander seeds and a large salt crystal. They are frequently seen hanging from some part of a woman's clothing, and written prayers for children are exceedingly common. They are worn in tiny locketts or bound upon the arm. After a woman has tried all the charms and worn all the prayers without result, she will at length take a sheep's liver to bed with her.

Perhaps a woman is childless because the jinn bear enmity toward her and have brought about the death of all her babies in infancy. There are especial ceremonies to be performed in such a situation. The woman makes a vow that if she be given a son she will give him to the Imam, or that she will dress him in black and allow him to go in the procession on the tenth of Muharram, that he or his parents will carry water on that day for the sake of Husain, or will give food

to the poor, or that she will sow forty bangles, with *bismilla* scratched upon each one, onto the child's black garments which he will wear the first ten days of the month of mourning, or that she will not cut his hair until he is seven years old, and then she will give the weight of it in silver or gold to the Imam

Miscarriage is frequent with women of Iran. The usual procedure to prevent it is to fasten around the waist a cord either white or of two colours, which has been twisted by a small girl. While someone reads the *Sura Ya Sin*, seven knots are tied in the cord, one at each time the word *mubān* (clear) occurs. As each knot is tied it is blown upon. This completed, it is tied about the waist and locked with a tiny padlock, over which a mulla has said a prayer. These cords and locks are kept in constant use, as they are loaned from friend to friend and from neighbour to neighbour.

Usually a woman desires that the first born child shall be a boy. She naturally becomes anxious to know the sex of her unborn babe, as it may mean great peace of mind. So as the time draws near she and her friends begin to augur in regard to the matter. There are many insignificant signs to which they attach more or less importance, among which are: If a woman sees a needle on the floor the child will be a girl, but if she sees a pin, it will be a boy. A friend sprinkles salt on her head, and if it causes itching and she scratches her head, the child will be a girl. If a woman rubs her upper lip, the child will be a boy. A knife and a pair of scissors are put, one under each end of her pillow, if in her sleep she turns her head to lie over the knife, the child will be a boy, if over the scissors, a girl.

Before confinement many things may be done to insure early delivery. At least once during her pregnancy the expectant mother should walk under a camel, or eat camel's flesh. She may wear a tiny bag that contains a piece of garlic skin, a salt crystal and a seed of the wild rue. The *Sura Imran* is sometimes written with musk and saffron upon paper and given to such a woman to wear, or she may decide to eat the paper upon which it is written. In either case it is effective, but in no case must she look upon a corpse, or her child will have the evil eye.

At the time of confinement, when the woman is "on the bricks" (compare Exodus 16), many things are done. First

of all her eyebrows are blackened, so that if a person dressed in bright clothes should enter the room, no harm will come to the mother or child. Incense is burned about the head of the woman in labour to hasten delivery. The dress of a young girl is torn to make delivery easy. That of a small child is preferable, because as yet her "eyes are not opened," i.e. she is inexperienced. If the labour pains have no force, then onions and salt are inserted into the rectum and the vagina is washed with water in which pomegranate skins have been boiled, and no one is allowed to leave the room in which the delivery takes place unless a nail has been pounded into the door post, otherwise the one who goes out takes the pains out and the birth is delayed. At times verse 32 of the Sura *Iunas* (Jonah) is written on the skin of a sweet squash and bound upon the arm of a woman in labour to hasten delivery. While in labour the woman should pray a great deal, because it is said that the "Five" are present and every petition will be granted. If the delivery is extremely difficult, someone, preferably a boy of about twelve years of age, goes to the roof and gives the *azan*, or prayer call, this hastens delivery. At such a time the husband is frequently called into the room, water is poured into the skirt of his long coat, up his sleeve and upon his feet. He has gathered up his coat to hold that water, so he stoops and drinks some of it. The wife then says to him, in her pain, that whatever she has due from him she will excuse, if only she be freed from her suffering. The women say that this word holds good and that many a man has taken advantage of the situation, and later on, when he divorces his wife, he thus escapes paying the amount stipulated in his marriage contract.

A plant which grows on the arid plains and hills of Palestine and Arabia, the sow bread or cyclamen, is used when delivery is difficult. First it is dried, and later on, when it is put into water it becomes somewhat fresh, if it is then placed in the woman's hand it will hasten delivery. The source of this custom is in the tradition that when Mary was giving birth to Jesus, out in an arid place, under a date tree, she grabbed hold of the ground and seized one of these plants. So it is called the *pany Maryam*, or "the fingers of Mary."

When the child is born, a needle or other piece of metal is stuck into the placenta, a piece of charcoal is added for good luck and all are buried in the ground. If the placenta

does not come readily, the woman blows her breath into an empty bottle, while a threaded needle is run through the cord. An old shoe may be tied to the cord for the same purpose.

After delivery a Koran, or a page from it, is put under the mother's pillow. The room in which she lies is usually not swept, if it is swept, the sweepings are put under the carpet or in the corner, because bad luck would follow throwing them out. For the first ten days, only those who were present at the birth have a right to enter the room, the entrance of others is believed to bring infection or misfortune, accordingly, gunpowder is put over the door through which the guest enters and all uncleanness goes into it.

In order that the new mother may soon recover, some woman who has experienced easy delivery with her child must be found to clean up the room. The new baby is passed three times into the neck and out of the skirt of the dress of a woman who has a healthy baby, so as to insure health to the newcomer. If the baby is born on Thursday night, then the parents must give away sweets, equal in amount to the weight of the child. If it is a girl, the mother frequently says that she has given birth to a black baby, meaning that her own "face is black" with shame, which is a common Iranian expression, because she has not borne a son. On the third day the new mother is given three dates to eat, so that the next child may be a boy. Later on she will take her baby to the bath on the same day that another woman with a little son is to be present. These two women will then throw some of their milk over each other so that their next children may be sons.

There is a saying that the first baby belongs to the crow, the second to the water, the third to the earth, the fourth to the wind, and the fifth to the mother.

After the birth an onion is put on a spit and placed above the mother's head to keep away *Ál*, the witch that snatches away tiny babies and steals the mothers' lives. The people stand in terror of this creature, she is considered to be one of the jinn, is four footed, has a tail, a long neck like a camel and a mouth and chin like a donkey. Some say that she has a mass of frizzy hair, and women with such hair are spoken of as having a head like *Ál*! *Ál*'s business is to take babies' lives or to torment the mothers till they die. She attacks only those who are weak. Her name should never be spoken.

in the presence of a pregnant woman, for the fear that comes at the mention of the name *Ál* makes her less able to resist her torments at the crucial time. Every means must be taken to keep this witch away, a light must burn all night, for she loves darkness. The woman should not be left alone, and in villages where it is necessary for the household to be away at work, a goat is tied in the room.

Many artificial means are used to keep *Ál* away: cotton is pasted onto the wall in small balls to represent eyes, nose, and mouth, an egg, a piece of charcoal, a knife and a pair of scissors are put under the mother's pillow, and an egg upon which a prayer has been written is put under the baby's mattress, so called fortresses are made around the child and its mother, over or through which *Ál* cannot pass, a line is drawn on the walls around the room with chalk or charcoal, or it may be scratched in with scissors or a knife. Often while doing this the person will say, "I am making a fortress and Mary and the child of Mary will keep it" or "I am making a fortress for whom?" For Mary and her child, may it be blessed."

If the husband or a brother be in the house, *Ál* will not come, because she has been frequently caught by men and made to swear by salt and bread that she will not harm a woman in their family for seven generations, whereupon she has been released. As a token of the pledge she has given a needle, which is handed down from generation to generation. One woman has a seal with a dent in it, which she claims is the mark of *Ál*'s tooth, for this woman's father caught her and this was the token of the compact made when he released her.

If all should go well with the mother and the babe for the first few hours, numerous precautions are taken. The midwife goes away and does not return until the sixth night, when *Ál* is supposed to come with all her wiles, to snatch the baby or to get the mother's liver. They believe that she is bolder on this night and that she sometimes even breaks over some of the fortifications, consequently, these fortresses must be strengthened and increased by the midwife, who arrives about sunset. She makes a circle of rice about the mother's bed, then draws another line around the room, and all the while she will be repeating, "For Mary and Mary's son." She also burns seeds of the wild rue over a brazier of hot coals, she



removes some of these, when they have been charred, and puts one between the mother's eyes, others she puts in the palms of the hands, and on the soles of the feet, and one seed she carefully places between the baby's eyes. A large round sieve, which is used for sifting grain, is turned upside down and the child is placed upon it, making just another fortress. The whole household must stay awake all night, the men must have firearms and shoot into the air now and then, they must pace about the house and out into the courtyard from time to time, and to keep awake the family usually enjoys a general feast, and greater care is exerted on this night as to those who enter the room. A woman whose baby died on the sixth night should not come in, or her grief will enter the heart of the mother and prove disastrous, however, in case one such woman should enter, a piece of bread that is saturated with grease is put over the door, so that the visitor's sorrow will pass into that. So many children do die on the sixth day from fever that is caused by infection, due to the work of a careless or ignorant midwife, that the belief has grown up that these deaths are due to the malicious work of the witch *Ál*.

Women who are stricken with puerperal fever often imagine that they see *Ál* in their delirium. One woman related how a neighbour declared that the witch had gotten her liver, for she saw her going out of the room and carrying it in her hand. This woman died soon afterwards. It is said that if the witch can be caught before she has time to drop the liver into water, she must give it back, there is then some hope that the patient may recover. Sometimes priests are brought to the house where a woman is sick with puerperal fever in order that they may pray and scare away the witch *Ál*, and dogs are also brought into the courtyard to bark at her and frighten her away.

A woman from Kerman said that it is a common belief that *Ál* carries a knife. This woman claimed to have seen her come into her room in the guise of a neighbour, the watchers suspected her, however, and caught her and took away the knife. *Ál* then fled.

Like other jinn *Ál* is much afraid of steel, and many of the charms for protection against her are of steel. When a woman recovers from her confinement she must not go near an ash pile nor stand under a tree, nor go near water, for these are

all favourite haunts of Ál, and if the woman has passed through the first six days and nights, she must not be left alone for forty days, because the other numerous jinn may come to annoy her. Some say that Ál herself does not bother boy babies, but that Tal, her brother, torments them after circumcision. This is another case of fever after infection.

Both the mother and child are cared for according to set rules. The babe is given butter and rock candy to eat until the mother's milk comes. The mother's diet for the first three days consists of a brew that is made from hounds-tongue in the morning, a broth of rice that is cooked with sugar and grease at noon, and tea at night. The fourth day a rooster and a hen are cooked together for her, and on the fifth and tenth days she is given bread, fried eggs and a thick soup that is heavy with grease. She is not allowed to eat fruit, nor vegetables, nor the curd that is so generally eaten, but she may have melon if it is in season. On the tenth day she may have vegetable soup. The old custom was to give no water for ten days, but now a small amount of boiled water is permitted, but during these ten days she must consume six and one half pounds of grease.

The bath arrangements are important. The baby is not bathed at birth. If a girl, she gets her first bath on the eighth day, but if a boy, he gets his on the tenth. For this purpose the mother and baby, the midwife and friends go together to the public bath and make of it a real occasion. Here the mother must perform certain rites, the onion which she had under her pillow during confinement, to keep Ál away, she now takes with her and steps upon it when she puts it on the second or third step as she descends to the bath, the knife or scissors which cut the cord must also be there, the mother's body is rubbed with a black ointment to give her strength, her face is covered with white clay, mixed with sheep's marrow, to give her beauty, and henna is bound upon her hair. At some time during the bath she eats some curd, with one foot hanging in the water and the other outside, to insure that her next child will be a boy.

The baby is lathered with soap, then dipped three times head first into hot water. They say the water is much too hot for the bath of an adult. This is to cleanse the child from its natural impurity, and besides, it is the baby's first

quartz or lime stone, which is to insure sufficient mother's milk. Or in place of one of these may be a seed of Job's tears, which is for love, or a piece of the bone from the hoopoe's wing, which is for kindness. And the tail of a rabbit is often put under a child's pillow in order that general good fortune may follow him.

## CHAPTER III

### THE JINN

NEXT in importance to the fear of the evil eye is the consideration given to jinn, a term which is used in general to include all the spiritual creatures that are variously spoken of as *div*, *afrit*, *ghoul* and *pari*. There is considerable confusion of thought concerning them. Some say each class belongs to a separate race others claim that they are of different tribes but of one race, and still others say that they are all of one tribe, but that they are able to assume diverse forms and shapes, and to live in any place under any conditions.

From the many instances in the literature where satans and *divs* are mentioned together, and likewise jinn and *pari* it would appear that the writers do make distinctions. One writer<sup>1</sup> says that the tribes of jinn are from the children of Iblis the son of Adam. They are creatures of fire, with the power to assume the features of any creature they desire, except those of a prophet or an imam. The poet Jalal al Din Rumi says they are "of fire yet not fire of vapour yet not vapour." The tribes that do not give trouble are the *pari*, and the evil ones are the *div*. Some are isolated behind the mountains of Kaf and do not associate with mankind, one group of them is in front of the Kaf mountain proper, and these live among men on the banks of rivers in gardens or on deserts, and especially in ruins and dark places like old public baths or caves. And it is said that all the *divs* are under the rule of Satan, whose abode is on a green island near the Kaf mountain.<sup>2</sup>

The *pari* are under their king, Malik Afshan, whose throne is in the midst of Kaf. On the east is the colony of the ruler Masitash, who has three hundred thousand slaves, each of which is a king of other jinn. And on the west side of Kaf are the possessions of Abdu'r Rahman, the son in law of Abdu'l Kadir. The Apostle Muhammad gave these jinn these particular names when they became Muslims. There are three thousand kings under Abdu'r Rahman, each of whom

has an army that cannot be numbered And there is another tribe, under their king Talu Khush, who is called *salim al nafs*, i.e. of good spirit, who are said to love mankind The Christian jinn are under Masidus, which means worshipper of the spirit, and the king of the Jewish jinn is Tututash, or a sorcerer There are kings of jinn who are like men, there are women also, and their daughters are the mothers of jinn, and their abode is Zulmatat, by the side of the water of life

Elsewhere we find that Tarturus was the father of all jinn, as Adam was the father of all men <sup>4</sup> For thirty six thousand years they obeyed God, while the air was in the ascendancy, but when fire prevailed they disobeyed Then when they heard the Koran, some of them believed "There are some of us who have resigned themselves to God (Muslims) and there are others of us who have gone astray" <sup>5</sup> Some authorities claim that the only real difference among jinn is the religious difference

According to the Koran the jinn were created of subtle fire <sup>6</sup> The general idea is that they are made of fire and thus they can pass through any substance, they can make themselves incredibly small and can take the form of hairs and be swallowed with food But the common people say that in their ordinary form they have cloven feet, triangular shaped eyes and long unkempt hair Most of the time they are believed to take the form of cats, especially all black or all white cats, accordingly, most of the people will say "in the name of God" before striking a cat The jinn flee from that holy expression, and if the cat runs away there is no doubt as to what it was <sup>7</sup>

The Imam Ja'far Sadik said that dogs of a solid colour are jinn, and spotted dogs are jinn that have been expelled from the jinn tribe <sup>8</sup>

According to the Koran there are good jinn and bad jinn, 'And there are among us good and others among us of another kind, we are of various sorts' <sup>9</sup> And there are Muslim jinn and infidel jinn <sup>10</sup> The Shi'ite jinn are the "holy jinn" <sup>11</sup> Every individual from among mankind is believed to have a twin from among the jinn, a *hamzad*, that is born at the same time with him This is brought out in al Ghazali's commentary on the sura "Joseph," <sup>12</sup> where the merchants who bought Joseph are said to have encountered a gazelle that was Joseph's *hamzad*, and was therefore to journey where he went, be sick

if he were sick, say what he would say, sleep when he would sleep, and die when he would die

But this twin from the jinn may be either a Muslim or an infidel. If it is a Muslim the individual will be fortunate, but if it is an infidel he will almost surely suffer illness or other misadventure that will be brought about by this inseparable companion. Anyone who is constitutionally frail is believed to have an infidel *hamzad*. There is no escape from this unhappy situation, the only hope of relief is to endeavour to bring about an harmonious relationship. The ordinary mode of procedure is first to consult a prayer writer, who will consider the case according to the patient's suspicions and will then prescribe the treatment. For a price that he names he will write three prayers, one of these is to be sewn up in green cloth and bound to the right arm, the second is to be buried preferably in a graveyard and the third is to be burned on Saturday night. After this the *hamzad* should behave himself.

Beside the very great number of *hamzads*, there are multitudes of other jinn. They are everywhere. A shaikh who has assisted in procuring some of this information remarked one day that there were probably three or four jinn in the room where we were working. One is constantly in danger of stepping on them or of pouring hot water on them, or of shaking upon them the live coals from the brazier used in heating or perhaps from the water pipe which folks commonly smoke. Consequently most people have the habit of saying "in the name of God" on such occasions, in order to give the jinn a chance to escape.

Fear of the revenge of the jinn makes people careful. While the *hamzad* never gets in the way, yet the others are always underfoot. When a child begins to cry or act as if afraid, and it is apparently without cause, they conclude that he must have hurt a jinn baby and its mother is retaliating. If the child's own mother should be present, she must milk some of her milk upon the spot where the child was sitting. This generosity will please the jinn parent and she will cease to punish the child. But in case the human mother should be absent, a nail may be driven into the ground, or into the floor, and when the jinn baby plays with this the trouble will end.

Jinn children like to play with human children, and this

naturally increases the possibility of harm to the humans. They also like to play with animals because the Apostle said that it was a good practice to keep pigeons or roosters in the house, so that the jinn children would play with them.<sup>13</sup> If anyone should have a fit it will be regarded as due to the malice of an infidel from the jinn. Perhaps at some time a jinn child has been severely injured, or scalded, and the fit is brought about in revenge. However, verses from the Koran may be worn by the afflicted to prevent further attacks from the hostile jinn.

In addition to their abodes that have been mentioned, jinn dwell also near waterfalls and springs, in fields in trees and under the ground. They love tombs and wells and kitchens.<sup>14</sup> The good jinn or *pari* may even inhabit shrines but evil jinn cannot come near any holy place, nor any holy person nor the Koran, nor the name of God. It is said that there are no evil jinn in the "holy city" of Meshed, because of the presence there of the tomb of the Imam Rida, for God has commanded all *devils*, all satans and all evil jinn to approach no nearer the city than four *farsakhs* (about fifteen miles). But just outside this limit they are said to be very numerous.

All jinn are kept out of heaven. Before Islam they could go near and listen, and come back and tell the others what they had heard, but Muhammad forbade them this privilege, and it is said that meteors are fiery darts from heaven that are hurled after those jinn who attempt eavesdropping.<sup>15</sup>

While most of the evil that is done by jinn is attributed to the motive of revenge, yet there is also a belief that at times they perform weird antics merely to frighten people, especially the sick. They come to frail people both in dreams and in their waking hours. A woman with puerperal fever should never be left alone, for it would be the special delight of the jinn to terrify her with their jokes. Some claim that they will even enter dead bodies, where they will caper about to make the corpse move and twitch, so as to frighten the onlookers. Avicenna is said to have put medicine into corpses in order to keep the jinn away.

Those who can hear the jinn are children, religious devotees, those who are sick, and women in confinement. While they know many languages, yet they have their own language also. Some people claim that they can talk to the jinn, and one little girl who was nearly always singing said that she sang

to the jinn, and in the case of a half witted girl who talked to herself in a jargon no one could understand, the friends were convinced that she knew the jinn language and was conversing with them

At times the jinn are believed to be exceedingly sympathetic. They wept when Amina, the mother of Muhammad, died,<sup>16</sup> and men jinn and angels wept when Muhammad was about to die.<sup>17</sup> Alas, when he did die mankind were able to hear the *pari* weeping.<sup>18</sup> And on the field of Kerbala, a family of the Beni al Ridain heard wailing, but as they looked all around they saw no one. It was the female jinn weeping and sympathizing with the women of the house of Bibi Hashim.<sup>19</sup> Also the jinn and the houris assisted Fatima and wept with her when Husam was killed.<sup>20</sup>

Among the women there are those who claim that the jinn have certain times they like best. Tuesday and Saturday nights are spoken of as "jinn nights," for it is believed that on these nights the jinn are most active and may therefore be most readily summoned. They are said to go to warm places in the winter, and upon their return in the spring they are lively and eager for activity.

There are particular people who are said to be able to see jinn. In fact it is said that if the brain of a fly is dried and powdered, and then mixed with the egg of an ant, if this mixture is rubbed upon the eyelids it will enable anyone to see them. Those prayer writers who are also "jinn summoners" (*jinn qur*) are supposed to have this power, and by means of crystal gazing they pretend to make others see them.<sup>21</sup> These "jinn summoners" are masters of deception. Here is one example of how they impose upon the simple and ignorant. A sorcerer who was asked to summon the jinn demanded a bowl of water, a wooden comb and a handkerchief. While she prepared these objects she went through horrible contortions. A crowd gathered, and as they watched her face and listened to her groanings they did not observe what she was doing. At last everything was ready. She had put a paper image upon the handkerchief and said that it would move when the jinn came. As she called the jinn to come she continued her noises, grimaces and writhings. Finally the paper image began to move and continued to move. The jinn had come! They were in the bowl! A man happened along and saw how frightened and yet how



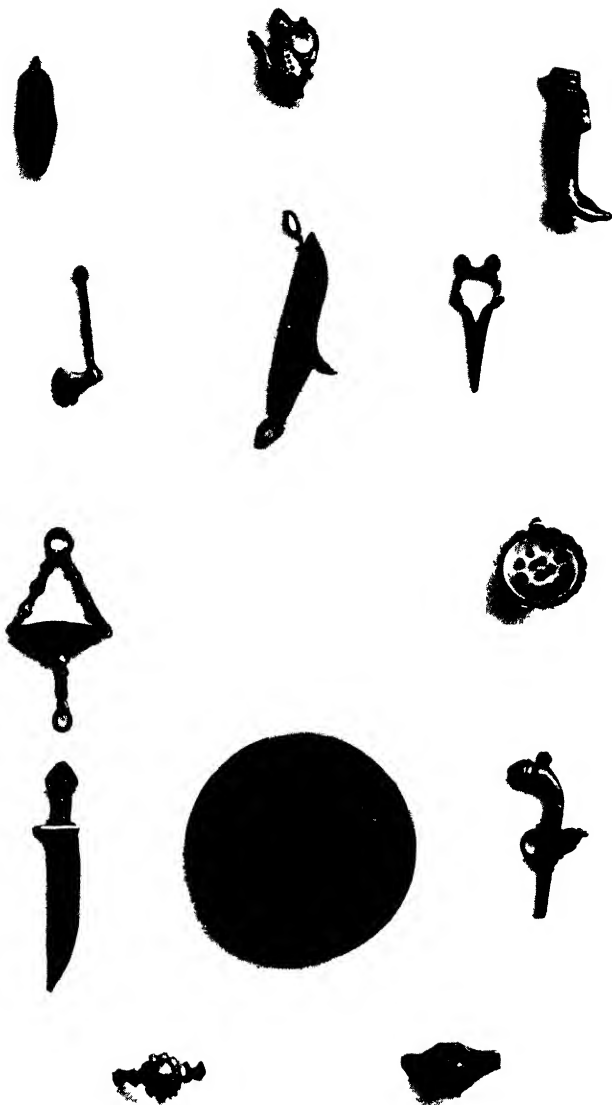
interested the group had become. He snatched the handkerchief from off the bowl and discovered the trick. She had put a needle into the wooden comb, which she let float upon the water. Then she placed the handkerchief over it. She then stuck the needle, which came through the handkerchief, into the paper image. As she performed her sundry gestures and jarred the bowl, the water was of course disturbed and as the comb moved so did the image. This she was doing repeatedly, each time for a fee.

One who desires to gain control over the jinn must first make exacting preparation. He goes to a cave or to an old ruin or to a lonely tomb, where he draws a circle and sits within it. For forty days he sits there reading from the Koran the verses assigned to him by the "jinn summoner" when day by day he reduces the amount of his food until his portion is one almond. If he is able to endure to the end, on the fortieth day all the great ones of the jinn will come with their king to eat bread and salt with him. Then they make a covenant that whenever he needs their help he can call an army of jinn to his aid. In the Koran and the traditions there are references to Solomon's control over jinn, *pari* and *afrit*.<sup>2</sup> It is also related in the traditions that Cain's wife was from the jinn and Abel's wife was from the houris and occasionally one hears stories of marriages taking place between jinn and human beings. There was a man in Nishapur who was reputed to have a wife from the jinn.<sup>23</sup>

Demented persons are frequently spoken of as *magnum*, or "jinn possessed" an expression that is used also to describe uncontrollable animals. Ali's twenty fifth miracle was the quieting of a camel that had thus gone mad. He employed the well known prayer -<sup>4</sup>

"God protect me for the sake of that prophet who is kind, and for the sake of his household, those whom thou hast chosen from the whole world. O God, quiet this unmanageable thing, and remove far from me the results of his evil. Thou hast everything in thine own hand."

The most powerful charms or talismans against the jinn are naturally taken from the Koran, since they cannot come near that holy book. The verses that are called the "four declarations," mentioned in the previous chapter, are most



### PROTECTIVE CHARMS

The miniature utensils wearing apparel and mother of pearl fish are worn to please the Inn and the silver talismanic disc and the turquoise and agate rings are for protection from disease and danger

creatures, but it furnishes quite enough to meet the needs of the fearful. In these books talismans and formulæ for jinn, *dev*, and satans are fully explained. Moreover the authoritative "Compendium of the Science of Religion" *Kafi fi Ilm al Din*, by al Kulaini, devotes an entire chapter to the jinn.

### THE PARI, OR FAIRIES

The *pari* are believed to be like doves and to be apt to haunt gardens and other pleasant places. They can enter human beings and such humans become like the *pari*. Instead of giving trouble they are helpful and frequently their aid is implored in time of trouble and sorrow. Bibi Hur and Bibi Nur are two of the *pari* to whom the women give banquets when they have some desire they earnestly wish to have accomplished. But no male must look upon the preparations for this feast or it will be of no avail. Likewise the king of the *pari* or the king's daughter, are addressed at times when feasts are prepared in their honour. Tuesday night is *pari* night and it is then that the feasts are spread. It is generally believed that these little creatures love to adorn themselves and part of the necessary preparation is to provide cosmetics for them.

A woman whose daughter was epileptic sought the blessing of the *pari* in the following manner. After giving one feast near a well another in a kitchen, she planned this one in a garden. She prepared a tray that contained a piece of bread, three candles of different colours, frankincense, seeds of the wild rue, an egg, and a dishful of salt. The latter was carefully smoothed off on top. Then she went to a garden, chose a quiet spot, lighted a candle and said, 'I am a sorrowful woman and seek help'. Next she put the candle under a bush and prayed, "O daughter of the king of the good jinn (the *pari*) take away my daughter's fits". Then she blew softly upon the candle flame from time to time, so that if the *pari* were not near enough to hear her, the prayer would be borne on the candle flame. The woman then withdrew and hid herself behind a tree so that the fairy princess would not be startled when she came to the feast. Then after a time she returned to the bush to see whether the princess had come, and whether she would help her. It is understood that if she is pleased and is willing to help, then she will make a mark

on the smooth surface of the salt, so that the mother may know that her daughter will recover. But if the salt is not disturbed, then the poor woman will think the fairy princess failed to come, or that she demanded a more elaborate feast so she must try it all over again another day, hoping always to find in the salt the desired sign of acceptance and help.

### THE DEMONS (*div*)

Many stories are told to children about kings' daughters who were carried off by demons and taken to some other country and there kept until rescued by the aid of the good jinn.<sup>24</sup> The earliest ideas in Iran regarding *div* were that they were able to inflate their bodies, rise into the air, and go very quickly from place to place. They are believed to be much larger than men, to have tails and horns and hoofs like cows, and set in their horrid faces, under protruding foreheads, are huge, round, deep set eyes. They have large noses, thick lips, and spotted skins. Such are the pictures of them that are drawn on the walls of the passage ways at the public baths.

The opinion of some is that originally the *div* were merely wild people, strong men of the jungle of Mazandaran, who fought with wild animals. And when they killed these animals they took the skins for clothing and wore them, heads, horns, tails and all. It was from this costume that the later descriptions were derived. Some of these ideas are derived from the Shah Namah of Firdausi.

We are told that it was before the time of Ali that the demons carried off young girls. For Ali went to their stronghold and fought with them, killing some two hundred or "two hundred thousand" of them! He then made a treaty with them whereby they were to become Muslims. And a talisman was made that would protect the wearer from all trouble the demons might inflict, and from that day to this they have not annoyed the Muslims. Some say that it was stipulated in the treaty that they were not even to come among mankind again. Notwithstanding the people still had a vague fear, and the Imam Ja'far Sadik, years after the time of the supposed treaty, said that anyone who read the sura "Jinn" seven times would not only be kept from the evil done by the *div*, but also from the fear of them.

Another explanation is sometimes given that the worshippers of Ahriman came to be called *div* by the worshippers of Ormuzd,<sup>28</sup> but this idea is rarely found, except among those who are exceptionally well versed in the traditions

According to the popular conception there are some of these *div* who live on the far side of the Kaf mountains, but some live among men, finding habitation in old public baths or in the ancient Zoroastrian towers of silence Their favourite places of abode, however, seem to be the deserts and the mountains All high mountains are inhabited by them Mount Damawand is held in awe by the villagers roundabout who believe its summit to be the very stronghold of the *div*, and from these lofty dwellings, the *div*, in their inflated condition, could easily descend upon the cities below

Many say that in the time of Jamshid the *div* were exceedingly numerous, but his sons and grandsons fought with them and though one son was killed, they wrought a great slaughter among the *div*

There are stories also of tremendous tasks the *div* accomplished for men One story is that they assisted the founders of the city of Isfahan by making a tunnel and by draining a lake from the place where the ruler desired to build the city Something similar is believed about the old fortress of Tabbas, which has in its walls huge bricks that are at least fifteen inches square and five inches thick The inhabitants of Tabbas say that no human being ever threw those bricks to a mason, so they think that those walls were built by the *div*

The *afrit* are the female *div* They are generally thought of, however, as the "old ones," as any cunning, wicked old woman may be called an *afrit* They are the magicians and evildoers in general among the *div*, and they hold the hour glasses of all the *div* and of some particularly evil men, such as the Caliph Ma'mun, who gave the poisoned grapes to the Imam Rida They drop these glasses when it suits their pleasure, and when a life glass belonging to a *div* is dropped, the one whose glass it is cries out, "I am burned" Then he disappears in a cloud of smoke

But in addition to the sura "Jinn," the sura "Jonah" is also frequently used for protection from the *div* It is written on deer skin with musk and saffron and must be worn on the person, and the *div* cannot come near the

wearer Merely reading the Koran is reasonably sure protection, and Hafiz wrote, "Let the *div* flee from that people who read the Koran"

The ghouls are but slightly different from the *div*, and some claim there is no difference They are robbers that dwell in deserts and lonely mountain ravines They mislead travellers on difficult roads, pretending to guide them on to better paths, they then lead them off into the trackless desert where they kill and devour them This idea may have something to do with the mirage And they are sometimes believed to haunt graveyards and to feed upon dead bodies

All the *div* are under the power and command of Iblis, the Devil, whose dwelling is in a green island near Kaf His other names are *Azazil* and Satan, and he was at one time the chief of the angels It is said that although he was ostensibly an angel, he was in reality one of the jinn,<sup>29</sup> and the learned say that every being at last returns to its original kind

The common story is that when Adam was created, God ordered all the angels to bow down before him Iblis refused,<sup>30</sup> saying that he who was made of light would not prostrate himself before one made of earth Then he fell to the earth and was so angry that the heat of his wrath burned the feathers from off his wings, then he bowed before God There was not a span of earth on which he did not bow, and when he had done all this he said to God, "Now that I have worshipped so much, what is my reward?" God told him he could have whatever he wanted He wanted only three things, he said, first to live till the day of resurrection, second, to go wherever he wished and in whatever shape he chose, and third, that whatever man received he should receive twice as much He desired most particularly that for every human that was to be born there should be two satans All these requests God conceded, but with this one restriction, that he should not go into the heart of man This, however, he has not obeyed, for in many cases the *hamzad* is regarded as a satan

The homes of the *shayatin*, or satans, are in all dirty places and under trees Spider webs in the corners of rooms are dwelling places for little satans, and there they are recognized in the small spiders that dangle on a web Dogs can see these minute satans But there are squashes and certain spices that the satans do not like, and they will not enter a house where they are kept Like the jinn, the satans can be dis-

persed by saying "in the name of God" At this they will withdraw to a distance of forty yards Moreover, the last sura of the Koran is much used against satans

"Say, I betake me for refuge to the Lord of men, the King of men, the God of men—against the mischief of the stealthily withdrawing whisperer (Satan), who whispereth in man's breast—against jinn and men"

And there is another verse that may be read before retiring, that one may be kept from the evil of Satan and his imps throughout the night

Your Lord is God, who in six days created the heavens and the earth, and then mounted the throne he throweth the veil of night over the day it pursueth it swiftly and he created the sun and the moon and the stars, subjected to laws by His behest is not all creation and its empire His ? Blessed be God the Lord of the Worlds"<sup>1</sup>

Other verses (2, 256-260) will protect the reader from all the wiles of Satan, and the additional verse 285 of the same sura will protect a whole household for three nights

Books for children are usually filled with stories of the jinn and the *du*. Among these are the *Khavar Namah*, the *Rustam Namah*, the *Iskandar Namah*, and the *Rumuz-i Hamzah*. Others that abound in stories of the jinn *div* and *pari* are the *Mathal-i Kul-i Musin*, the *Shah Namah* and the Arabian Nights

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the *Jannat al Khulud* by Mulla Muhammad Rida Imami

<sup>2</sup> *Mirat al Khulal*, by Amir Ali Khan Ludhi p 179 Here statements of Muhammad are given that a satan cannot take a prophet's shape so that anyone who has seen Muhammad in a dream has truly seen him

<sup>3</sup> Consult the *Jannat al Khulud* the pages of which are not numbered

<sup>4</sup> *Mirat al Khulal*, p 309

<sup>5</sup> Sura 72 14

<sup>6</sup> Sura 15 27

<sup>7</sup> Jalal al Din Rumi, *Mathnawi*, vol 1 p 541

<sup>8</sup> Majlisi *Hilyatu l Muttakin* p 130

<sup>9</sup> Sura 72 11

<sup>10</sup> Sura 72 14

<sup>11</sup> In the *Jannat al Khulud*

- <sup>1</sup> Ghazali *Tafsir al Yusuf* p 72 Cf Sura 41 24
- <sup>13</sup> Majlisi *op cit* p 127
- <sup>14</sup> Cf Lane *Arabian Society in the Middle Ages* ' p 37
- <sup>15</sup> Sura 37 5 8 and 10
- <sup>16</sup> Kashifi *Raudat al Shuhada* p 40
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid* p 68
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid* p 83
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid* p 228
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid* p 223
- <sup>1</sup> Kashifi *Asrar i Ghasimi*
- <sup>2</sup> Sura 21 81 34 11 13 and 2 96
- <sup>23</sup> Majlisi *Bihar al Anwar* vol xiii Persian trans p 306
- <sup>24</sup> Khawnsari *Khulasat al Akhbar* ch xix
- <sup>25</sup> Sura 72 6
- <sup>26</sup> Sura 3 1 2
- <sup>27</sup> Sura 3 77
- <sup>28</sup> Notably in the *Dabistan i Mazahib*
- <sup>9</sup> *Mirat al Khial* p 211
- <sup>30</sup> Sura 2 32
- <sup>31</sup> Sura 7 52



## CHAPTER IV

### LOVE AND MARRIAGE

FROM the traditions we learn that the prophet Muhammad said that a Muslim should take a wife from his own family. Consequently marriage between cousins is common, and owing to the widespread custom of plural marriages, a strange mixture of relationships may be found under one roof. But there is one condition which prohibits the marriage of cousins. Should a woman nurse her niece or nephew, in case of the illness or death of her sister, then this child cannot marry any of her children, for they would be of 'the same milk,' and therefore like brothers and sisters. This restriction holds to the second generation.

The Prophet advised men to marry virgins with sweet mouths and capable of bearing many children, and it is related that he said of large families, "I will praise you on the Day of Judgment and say you are better than the Prophet's family." Whenever he desired to take unto himself a new wife, he told the woman whom he sent to arrange the matter, to smell the girl's neck and to be sure that she had fat ankles. Ali the Prophet's nephew and son-in-law said it was well to choose a woman who was tanned (of wheat colour), who had wide black eyes, big hips, and who was of medium height.

The Imam Ja'far Sadik said that a wife is like a fetter around a man's neck and should not be chosen carelessly. He claimed that it is a sin to marry a woman for her beauty or her property, but held that she should be selected for her piety and worth, trusting that God would bestow upon her the beauty and wealth desired. He insisted also that it was as important for the bride to have a good head of hair as it was for her to be pious.

And the Prophet said that the best of women is the one who is loved by her husband and her relatives, who is humble in her husband's presence, who always listens to him, who adorns herself and is cheerful solely to be his joy, and who is virtuous and modest and retiring before others.<sup>1</sup>

It has long been the custom to betroth boys and girls when they are very young, in some cases even in infancy, and occasionally before the child is born. The marriage may or may not take place soon after the betrothal. But during the last two decades there has been a tendency among the upper classes to keep their daughters at home until they are fourteen or fifteen years old, and recent changes in the marriage laws of the country have set the minimum age for a girl to marry at sixteen.

Sometimes a girl has passed the usual age for betrothal and has not been sought as a bride. In such cases there is recourse to the power of "prayers." If verses 96-99 of the sixth sura,

"Cattle" be written out and bound to her foot she will surely have an offer of marriage in the immediate future. Or if her parents wish a particular young man for her husband, and as yet no advances have been made from his side, they may arrange to have verses 71-73 of the thirty-sixth sura,

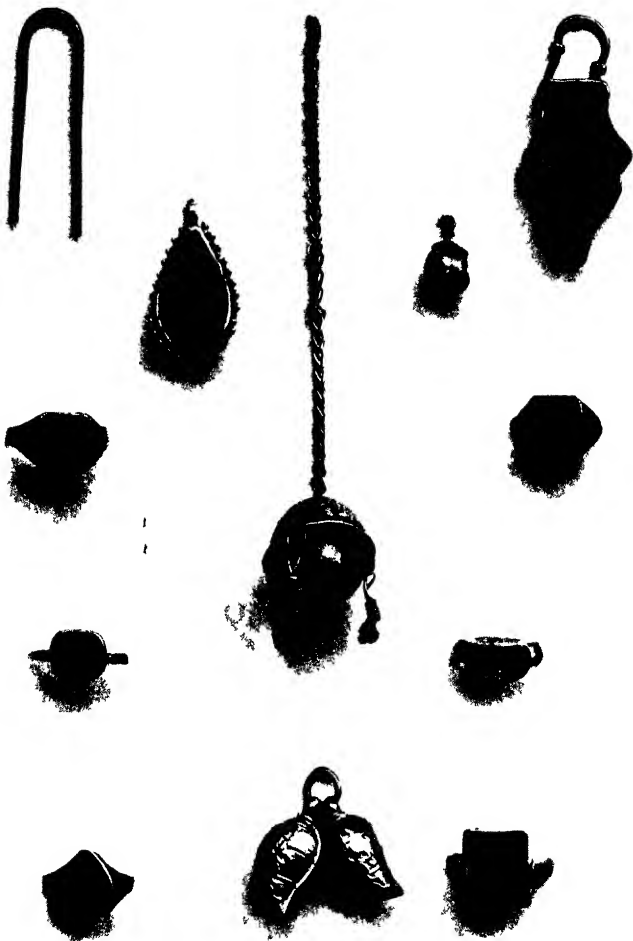
"Ya Sin," read in the presence of the two. On this their desire for one another should develop. But if it should not be practicable for the two to be in the same house together, owing to restricted social customs, verse 10 of the fifth sura, "Table" together with the man's name and the name of his mother, may be written on a garment worn by the young woman, and some of the earth upon which the man has trod will be gathered and sprinkled over it. An offer of marriage will soon be made.

For generations marriages have been arranged by a representative from each family concerned. If the age, beauty, temperament and accomplishments of the bride and the terms of the dowry offered by the groom are all satisfactory, the marriage may be consummated. The features of the marriage ceremony and the accompanying festivities differ somewhat with the locality and the status of the families concerned. Yet there is marked similarity throughout.

A village wedding which was witnessed differed only in minor details from another wedding in which the bride was a young widow of a prominent family and the groom belonged to the class of the priests. The following features were common to both ceremonies. What might be called the bridal altar was arranged upon a white cloth that was spread upon the floor, at one end was the place prepared for the bride, and in front of her stood a mirror, in which the groom would

get his first glimpse of her. On each side of the mirror stood a candlestick with a lighted candle, and in front of the mirror lay a Koran. Here and there around the edge of the cloth were plates of sweets to be served to the guests, and also there were dishes that contained special foodstuffs that are necessary on the marriage occasion. The plate of bread and greens (mint and leeks) is symbolic of the hope that the larder will never be empty, and guests who eat of these will never suffer from toothache. The bowl of sugar appropriately suggests the desire that the bride's lot will be happy, the saucer of small white candies is all ready to be thrown over the bride's head for good luck, and the guest who manages to gather some of them at that time and eat them is sure to be fortunate. Nuts are for the guests to put quickly into their pockets to insure their always having ready money, and especially to bring good fortune to the groom. The sticks of cinnamon the bride must take to her new home, to burn them as incense, from the small bowl of honey the bride and groom must eat, as a declaration of their love for each other, the box of matches modestly expresses the hope that the bride's way may always be bright, and two large cones of sugar are to be rubbed together over the bride's head, to suggest the hope that she will always be good natured and happy. The remainder of this sugar she will keep, and in case she has reason to suspect her husband's fidelity, she will put a piece of it into his food and win him back. Another dish contains seven spices, which are to be kept and used when necessary for the same purpose, and plates of wheat and rice are to be showered over the bride when she leaves her paternal home. The two candles must be allowed to burn out, on no condition are they to be blown out, and if one or both should be put out accidentally it would be a bad omen, for it would mean that there would be a cutting off of the life of the one for whom it burned.

The place where the bride sat during each of these ceremonies had been prepared with care. One of her near relatives had put a piece of pink cloth, which had been cut into the shape of a tongue, into a hole that was dug in the floor, just under the place where she was to sit before the mirror, so when later she gave her consent to be his wife, she was sitting in triumph upon the grave of her husband's tongue! For further protection to her good name, her mother, or other close relative,



#### LOVE CHARMS

vote the two silver almonds for companionship the holy seed in the pendant the  
 magnet the goldstone and a seed of Job's tears for fidelity and the locket and rings  
 for happiness



put a cloth over her head and sewed it up, as she said, "I sew up the tongues of the husband's relatives" Still she continued to sew, and said, "I sew together the love of the bride and the groom"

While the contract was being read, and before the bride had answered, her hair was unbrided and allowed to fall loose over her shoulders a sign that she was to be free and was not to be enslaved by her husband or his family The mother of the groom was present throughout

After the ceremony seeds of the wild rue were burned in a brazier of hot charcoal, and this was passed about the heads of the bridal pair so that the smoke enveloped them The object was to ward off danger from the evil eye During all of these performances the bride did not speak nor smile, but sat still and expressionless Should she fail in this self control she would detract from her husband's dignity

When all was over a dish containing wild rue seeds was passed among the guests It is believed that these seeds are hallowed by being with the food at a wedding feast, and thus magic may be done with them For example if a few of them are put in a place where a man is accustomed to do much of his work so he may stand or sit on them he will not be dismissed from his position

Practices such as these and many others are carefully carried out at most weddings It is true that some of them have become mere jokes among the people, as the throwing of rice and old shoes has become with us, yet a good many of them are seriously regarded and are not omitted lest evil might follow

After the marriage, when the bride has been taken to her new home which is usually the home of the husband's parents, there are problems of adjustment which may call for serious consideration Charms innumerable are designated for such occasions

If a woman thinks her husband's affection is growing less, there are plenty of older women among her family and friends whom she may consult as to how to regain it, and they are sure to have suggestions from their own experiences With the practice of polygamy woman's position has been sufficiently insecure to make it advisable that every eventuality should be carefully anticipated One of the most common charms and one which, perhaps an older woman will bring

out from her box or jar of treasures, is a large grey seed with a silver bar put through it to keep the husband loving and faithful. They are still worn, and until very recently it was a usual sight in an ordinary group of women to see these seeds dangling from several shoulders. If this does not work, or if a woman fears that it is not enough protection she will wear a piece of artificial "gold stone." This is to be had at a moderate price in all shapes and sizes, beads to be strung on a bracelet or a necklace, small flat pieces to be set in rings, and long cylindrical bars to be mounted between two small silver caps and fastened to a string of charms.

A steel magnet is much used in love magic, as its power for attracting objects is interpreted as magic power to draw the man toward the wearer. An iron bracelet is often worn by village women. Since her husband is obliged to go to the city frequently to take his produce the village woman thinks that this will keep him from the temptation of taking a temporary wife while absent from his spouse, and it relieves her of loneliness and worry. A piece of snake skin and the fangs of a viper are also held to be very powerful agents to keep a man fond of his wife.

Before the lace or cloth head dress had been generally discarded, many women wore under it, fastened to the hair on the crown of the head, a silver or brass charm. On one side were scratched the faces of a man and a woman side by side. This charm was to keep the husband faithful and was much esteemed by women whose husbands were away from home a great deal. It is still worn by many women especially by those who retain the old time head covering, while others conceal it under their clothing.

Furthermore it is said that a woman must not look into a mirror, nor use a comb, at night, or she may lose her husband's regard. And if her shoe falls on the floor sole up, she must hasten to turn it over and spit upon it, or her husband will die.

There is a Muslim tradition that when Sarah saw that Abraham was becoming interested in her maid, she got nose and toe rings for Hagar and had her lips tattooed so that she would appear ugly in his sight. But instead of this he was delighted and thought her very beautiful. Consequently, for a long time it was the custom among many women to tattoo a small spot between the eyes and another on or under the chin.

to make themselves more attractive. They say that nowadays, however, most men will not marry women who are tattooed.

When a woman thinks her husband is growing less attentive, or if rumours have reached her that he is inquiring about another woman, she will rub pig's fat on his shoes to make him repulsive to the other person. If it can be accomplished, she will also rub some of it on the woman herself, and he will then despise her and become more fond of his wife. The fat of the wolf is used in the same way.

If a woman has doubts as to her husband's fidelity, when she makes *halva*, which is a favourite sweetmeat of Iran, she will use a silver ring that is set with a love talisman as a seal. With this she will mark the surface of the *halva*, and as her husband eats it his heart will be drawn toward his wife. A piece of deer skin also, with a prayer written upon it, is believed to be very good to keep a husband loving and faithful.

A particular stone which is said to be taken from the head of a snake and is therefore called the "seal of the snake," *muh'r i mar*, is set into a ring. The husband's name is scratched on the under side and the wife's name on the upper side, if the wife wears this ring, domestic tranquillity will result and she will have a position of superiority, and if it is rubbed on her husband's back from time to time, he will remain ever faithful to her.

In Meshed there is a small shrine with a dome of sun-dried brick where anxious women take bread and sour milk to give to the poor, for this good deed, they claim, will sometimes bring back a wayward husband.

Until recently, when the marriage laws of the country were changed, and accordingly a man cannot now take a second wife without the knowledge and apparent consent of the one he has, Iranian women seldom felt any sense of security. They did not know when that second wife, called *hawu* or *vasni*, might appear. Her coming might mean divorce, and it would certainly mean loss of position, for the first wife. Incited by this fear, many women have taken pains to become skilled in magic. But once the dreaded co-wife came, unless they became friends, as sometimes did happen, the wife would usually set about diligently to regain her place in her husband's affection.

Some of the practices in "black magic" were designed to



meet these situations "Job's-tears" are much used at such times. These seeds are worn on bead bracelets or they may be attached to some other charm, or the wife may even pound them to powder and put them in the husband's food, so that he will become more fond of her. And if she wishes to make her rival displeasing to him, she gives the same food to her, only she adds vinegar because it is believed that this combination will make her crazy, and her foolish actions will disgust the man, so that he will cease to love her. But the injurious power of this seed in the system is supposed to last for only forty days.

A prayer that may be used by a co-wife to keep the common husband's love can be counteracted in its influence by these "Job's tears" seeds, which are said to have the power to overcome almost any form of magic. The Iranian women have mistakenly called this plant the mandrake.

At times a wife may get some of the hair of her rival wife tie it into knots blow upon it and say a prayer, and the husband will cease to love her, or when in the bath, one wife may, with the connivance of the bath attendant, get some of the skin rubbed from the other wife's back. This she puts into the husband's food, that he may turn against her rival. Or a wife may take two pieces of black money, *i.e.* copper or nickel coins, scratch on one of them the face of a man and on the other the face of a woman, tie them back to back and give them to a "dead washer" to put into the stomach of a corpse. Afterwards, as long as the husband and that rival live they should despise each other.

In matters having to do with love and marriage there are charms which men use also, but it is much more difficult to get details concerning them, for men are more reticent about telling their superstitions. One was related to the effect that if a man has a disobedient wife, and if he can manage to write Sura 2:143 on her tongue with oil, then after that she will become tractable.<sup>1</sup>

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> Majlisi *Hilyatu l-Muttakin* p. 31 ff

## CHAPTER V

### SAINTS SAIYIDS AND PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

THE people of Islam regard their saints and martyrs with sacred reverence, no people have undertaken more perilous journeys or endured greater hardships to reach the tombs of their holy dead. Most of the saints thus honoured are the Prophet's immediate family and their descendants, though great poets and scholars are accorded places of high esteem.

Muhammad prayed for the dead,<sup>1</sup> but the worship of them was forbidden until the time of the Imams, and many of the practices at the tombs are not acts of worship, but are performed for the purpose of obtaining some blessing. The little town of Tun furnishes a typical example of the veneration of a saint, where the people visit the grave of their local "Shaikh," and sit for hours with their ten finger tips upon the mound of his grave, 'so that the goodness of the deceased may enter them'."

The Shi'ite Muhammadans hold Muhammad, Fatima and the twelve Imams in great reverence and refer to them as the "fourteen mediators," and when the name of any one of them is mentioned, prayer is offered for Muhammad and his household. The supreme position that is given to the Prophet, to Fatima (his daughter), to Ali (his son in law), and to Hasan and Husain (his grandsons), is indicated in the use of the expression the 'Five,' the origin of which is shown in the following story.<sup>2</sup>

One day Muhammad said to his daughter that he felt indisposed and would lie down under his *abba*, or cloak. Shortly afterwards Hasan came in and asked for his grandfather. When Fatima told him he was under the *abba*, Hasan asked his grandfather if he might lie down too. Muhammad gave permission and Hasan crawled under the cloak. An hour passed and Husain came in and asked where his grandfather and Hasan were. Fatima told him that they were both under the *abba*, and he went and got under with them. Then Ali came, he greeted Fatima and said that he smelled

the "fragrance of the Prophet," and Fatima told him that Muhammad and the two boys were under the *abba*. Ali asked to join the group, so he also crawled under the cloak. Finally Fatima went and sat with them under the *abba*. Then God spoke to all the angels and said, "O angels, from the beginning of time and the pillars of heaven, I did not create the sky nor the spread out earth, nor the light of the moon, nor the shining of the sun, nor the revolving of the heavens, nor the sea that surges to and fro, nor the ships that sail on the sea, *except for the love of these five under the abba*." Gabriel then asked who was under the *abba* and God told him that they were his own, the house of prophecy, Fatima, her father, her husband and her sons. Gabriel said, "If you will allow me, I will go to earth and become the sixth." God was willing so Gabriel descended, greeted Muhammad and told him what God had said about the creation of things. He was then allowed to enter the group under the *abba*, where he told them that God had chosen them and wanted to remove all their sins so that they might become a cleansed family. Ali asked what honour there was in thus sitting together under the *abba*, so Muhammad took oath that special blessings would come to any and every gathering of Shi'ites when this story should be related.

The "Five" are believed to be present at particular crises in life. Women in labour pray to them, for it is believed that at this time especially every prayer addressed to the "Five" will be answered. When asked why the name of God was not included, the answer was given that it is in "Ali." This is generally denied by the educated, but it is commonly believed by illiterate women. Oaths are frequently taken by "the five bodies of the family of the *abba*."

#### SAIYIDS

The descendants of the Prophet and of his family are the Saiyids. They are treated with marked deference, especially at the shrines of the Imams. One of the accepted traditions reports Muhammad as saying, "I will give you two things, one the Word of God (the Koran) and the other my progeny (the Saiyids). Consider my children great, honour the good ones for my sake and the bad ones for God's sake, and this shall be merit for you."<sup>3</sup> He also said, "A fifth of your goods you must give to the Saiyids."<sup>4</sup>

The Saiyids all know well enough about this tradition, for among them are many professional beggars, who accost the passer-by with, ' I am a child of the Prophet ' It is *necessary* for you to give to me " And in case the beggar has a child with him, he cries, " This child is a Saiyid and you *must* give to him " Also when a Saiyid of rank enters a gathering, all will rise to greet him and give him the place of honour Whether these distinctions will pass away, along with the changes in the practices on religious anniversaries, the change of dress, and the coming of a united national life, remains to be seen

There is a weeping Saiyid who stands on the streets of Meshed, and who receives alms without asking Everyone recognizes, as he leans dejectedly against the wall, that he is silently weeping for his ancestors, and when he is rewarded the giver adds to his own store of merit

Another conspicuous descendant of the Prophet in Meshed is called " Saiyid Shah " He is comparatively well off and collects money from the wealthy to give to the poor On special holidays they go in crowds to his house, to get the coins which he distributes Since peculiar powers are attributed to the Saiyids, each of these coins is regarded as sacred, for his hands have touched it, and it is carefully cherished to bring good fortune On the streets, this " king of the Saiyids " is always surrounded by a crowd of those who go to him just to touch his hand He carries a bundle of sticks and strikes whomsoever he chooses Before the recent removal of the veil by Government decree, if a woman did not seem to him to be properly covered, or if she were talking in the streets, which was considered bad manners for a woman, he took it upon himself to reprimand her, which he did with a sharp tap of one of the sticks One woman related how she had suffered for hours with a headache after he had struck her The wind swirling down a narrow street had blown her garment about and exposed her somewhat, and as she was wearing stockings instead of the full bloomers which come down to the ankles, he was offended These blows are regarded by many, however, as favours, and it is said that they cure various ailments, and strange to say, they are believed to be especially good for headache ' Villagers go to him and ask him to strike them so that their sins may be forgiven and they may go to heaven He also writes prayers for those who request them

Mullas who are Saiyids are regarded as possessing greater holiness than others, and women plan to be present when they perform their ablutions in order to catch the water as it falls from their hands. As this water is holy and is believed to have healing properties, it is carefully kept, to be used in cases of illness. All Saiyids are believed to possess powers of healing, and many a mother with a sick child has taken a lump of sugar to a Saiyid to have him touch his tongue to it. She has then given this to the child to eat, confident of its efficacy. Since the Saiyid is a son of the Prophet, his spittle, like that of the Prophet, has healing power.<sup>5</sup> His very presence carries healing and often he is brought into a sick room just to stand at the bedside. Garments worn by Saiyids partake of the traits of the wearers, and pieces are requested for use as preventive and healing charms.

It is said that as a rule men do not seek Saiyid women as wives, for the deference they demand of their husbands is too much. Parents are glad enough, however, to give their daughters in marriage to Saiyids, and will even at times refuse to accept a dowry, and will provide everything themselves, just for this privilege.

But with the changes that are taking place in religious thinking among the educated classes, many of these customs are being given up. Among the masses, however, there is still little change in these long established attitudes. On the *Aid i Kadr*, the festival that commemorates the day on which Muhammad is said to have designated Ali as his successor, and which is spoken of as "Saiyids' Day," devout Shi'ites feel that they must kiss the hands of seven Saiyids for merit. Women flock to the houses where there are Saiyid women, there they kiss their hands and feet and garments and open their clothing and kiss their necks and chests. And in return for the honour shown them, the Saiyids often pretend to forgive the sins of the devotees and of their families, those sins which were committed by them during the last seventy years and those which they may commit during the coming seventy years.

#### PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE

Aside from the Kaaba at Mecca, the most significant holy places for the Shi'ites are the graves of the Prophet, of Fatima his daughter, and of the eleven Imams. Muhammad and

Fatima and four of the Imams are buried at Medina, in the Bakia cemetery, and naturally the Shi'ites resent greatly the work of the Wahabis in levelling this cemetery so that the sacred graves can no longer be identified

In Irak, or Mesopotamia, there lie seven of the Imams, two at Kazimain a suburb of Baghdad, and three at Samarra, while Ali is buried presumably at Najaf, and the martyrdom of Husain took place at Kerbala. But one of the Imams perished in far eastern Iran, and his tomb is at the present city of Meshed, and Iranians have long been encouraged to visit especially this famous place of pilgrimage within the bounds of their own country. The twelfth Imam has no grave, since he is believed to be alive but in "concealment," but the well at Samarra in Irak into which he is said to have disappeared is regarded as sacred, and a tiled dome has been erected above it. There are also many graves of those "born of the Imams," such as that of Masumah, the sister of the Imam Rida, at Kumm, which are thought of by many as having only slightly less importance than those of the Imams themselves. Other graves of less note have also been made places of pilgrimage. Since most of the Imams had many children, these graves of descendants of Imams are numerous.

Localities where miracles are reported to have occurred, as at *Kadlangah*,<sup>6</sup> have become places of pilgrimage. Small domes, some round, some conical, some whitewashed, are scattered throughout the country. They usually mark the graves of persons with reputations for piety and generosity. Travellers stop at such places to pray and thus to honour the saint by their worship at his tomb. Graves of most of the famous poets are also regarded as sacred shrines, as in the case of the tombs of Mulla Rumi and Abdul Ansari near Herat in Afghanistan.

Trees under which saints are said to have sat or slept, or to have had a dream, are numerous, and they too are considered sacred. Their branches are covered with rags and strings, fragments from the clothing of the pilgrims who have tied them onto the trees to signify some sworn vow or some expressed desire.

Strange and marvellous phenomena of nature are regarded with awe and are therefore to be held sacred. Near Meshed there is a waterfall, the source of which is high up on the side of the gorge. The water rushes in a large stream from the

crevice in the rock Throughout the ages it has worn away the layers of rock until a huge cavern has been formed Prayers, rags and strings have been plastered high up on the ceiling of this cavern Apparently these votive offerings were first fastened into soft mud and then thrown with skill and strength up against the vaulted ceiling, where they have remained

And here and there is a sheer cliff that rises from a river bed and that is said to have been made by a miraculous deed of one of the Imams, usually of Ali Many a precipitous cliff is pointed out as a place where his sword, *dhu'l fahar*, cut through the mountain, and people visit such places when they go for an outing, and take pleasure in recounting the legends about Ali's great sword

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada*, p 160

*Riad al Kuds* by Mirza Sadr al Din Wa'iz Kazwini vol II  
p 258

<sup>3</sup> Wensinck Handbook of Early Muhammadan Traditions  
p 169

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* p 124 under *Khums*

<sup>5</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada* p 79

<sup>6</sup> Cf chapter on Stones

## CHAPTER VI

### PILGRIMAGE

PILGRIMAGE is one of the necessary duties for the Shi'ite as well as the Sunnite Muhammadans<sup>1</sup>. It is incumbent upon each believer to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, but on account of the poverty among the masses of the Iranian people, as well as the great distance involved, comparatively few are able to fulfil this part of the Muslim law, so the many blessings that are attached to pilgrimages to the tombs of the Imams, as stipulated in the traditions, are readily accepted and allowed to compensate for their failure to make the trip to Mecca.

But the longer the journey and the greater the number of hardships endured, the more merit there is for the pilgrim. If a misfortune is experienced on the road, it helps to make the pilgrimage acceptable, or if the pilgrim dies on the way, he goes direct to heaven. Many undertake long and perilous journeys on foot, either in fulfilment of a vow, or to gain merit through the sufferings which they know full well are before them. There are high mountain passes to cross, regions infested with robbers to pass through, and worst of all, there are long stretches of barren desert, where water is available only at intervals of twenty to forty miles. Travellers along the routes that are most frequented by pilgrims can testify to the sufferings of those travelling on foot, and sometimes the pilgrim has reached the state of thirst where his tongue is so dry and swollen that he is unable to articulate, and can ask for water only by means of signs. His little earthen water jug is as dry as the road and suggests that long ago he had sucked out the last drop. If the traveller has water to give, as soon as the pilgrim is able to speak, he calls down upon the giver the eternal blessings of the saint to whose tomb he is bound, but if the traveller is an unbeliever (*i.e.* not a Muslim), the pilgrim may apologize to the saint for thus blessing him, and add, "If God wills, may he change his religion and become a Muslim."



Since the coming of the automobile into Iran, most pilgrims on the main highways now travel by that means. There are some, however, who claim that much of the merit is lost by thus covering the distance so rapidly, but others say that the discomfort of being packed into a truck or a bus, with almost twice as many passengers as should be carried, of breathing fumes of gasoline, of being half suffocated with the dust that swirls into the car, make the hardships no less than the old way. The chief difference is that they are sooner over.

On the old main roads which lead to sacred cities, one may see extensive graveyards on the outskirts of the towns. With the making of new motor roads many of these old roads have been abandoned, and the traveller misses this feature which speaks most eloquently of the people's faith in their saints. For it is believed that if the dust upon which pilgrim feet have trod falls upon a grave, then the one buried there will have all his sins forgiven. A corpse will be carried along the road with the hope that some of this dust may fall upon the bier, and this power is effective, not only for the dead, but upon whomsoever the sacred dust falls, for no matter how hardened a sinner he may be he receives pardon for all his sins.

Meshed is noted as the place of the martyrdom of Ali Rida, the eighth of the twelve Imams, and it contains his tomb. All around the sacred area of the Shrine there were formerly great expanses of cemetery. With the extensive municipal improvements which have been made recently, much of this old burying ground has been obliterated. These cemeteries witnessed to the hopes of merit, not only of the ones who requested that they be interred there, but of those who have carried out the wish of a deceased friend or relative and have brought the mortal remains, many from great distances, to be buried "under the shadow of the golden dome."

The Shrine which has been built over the grave of the Imam Rida is one of the most important in the Shiite world, and the traditions are full of statements concerning the value of a visit to this tomb.<sup>2</sup> A few of these may be given as examples.

On the Day of Resurrection, four of the earlier holy men, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and four of the later ones, Muhammad, Ali, Hasan and Husain, will be in the highest heaven and will draw a rope across the front of the Throne of God. All those who have made

the pilgrimage to the graves of the Imams will sit on the ground at the foot of the Throne, but those who have made the pilgrimage to the grave of the Imam Rida will sit nearest, and the favours shown them will be greater than any others

Whoever stays one night in the Shrine of the Imam Rida becomes as one who has made the pilgrimage to the Throne of God

The Imam Rida himself said, 'Whoever makes the pilgrimage to my tomb will have my presence with him at three important times first, when the good and bad are separated to the right and left, second, at the Bridge of Sirat, and third, at the weighing of merits'

The person who makes a pilgrimage to the Imam Rida will on the Resurrection Day, which is of 70,000 years' duration, have a pulpit of his own placed in front of God's Throne and at this pulpit he will sit until God has finished his accounting with mankind God will then take him to heaven

Another said, "Between the two mountains of Tus is a handful of dust from Paradise Whoever goes to it is freed from the fire of Hell"

Local stories also have arisen which illustrate the belief of the people that the Imam was a man of supernatural power The following is typical The Imam was in Nishapur one time when there was great drought, and the people were going out side the city to pray for rain The Imam went also and prayed with them In due time the rain came and its coming was attributed to the prayer of the Imam, but the Governor planned a reception to which Rida was to be invited and to be humiliated for giving the impression that the rain had come in answer to *his* prayer, when thousands of others had also prayed Accordingly, in the presence of a great company, the Governor began to rebuke the saint for spreading this report, and the vizier, who had started all the talk, was in high spirits Now the room in which they were sitting was hung with curtains on which had been painted the Lion and the Sun, the Persian emblem The Imam Rida became weary of these remarks, so he told the lions on the curtains to become alive and to devour the guilty vizier This they did at once, so the vizier fell victim to his own trickery, and the guests fled in terror But the Imam then spoke to the lions and in

perfect order they took their places again in the curtains, and all became serene

The story of this event so impressed the people that some said that he was able to raise the dead. For this his enemies arranged a test. A young man was to be borne alive on a bier to the mosque at a time when the Imam was known to be there, the mother was to beg him to raise her son, and she was then to report that the whole thing was a hoax. When the bier was brought in, the Imam was still at his prayers, and the mother told her son he might as well sit up and rest until the proper time. But the boy did not move. She went closer and insisted that he rise, and when this effort failed she removed the sheet from his face, and behold her boy was really dead! The Imam then, in the presence of all who had come to ridicule him, commanded the boy to rise and he did so.

From this it is not difficult to understand how the average Shiite Muhammadan uneducated, credulous, and superstitious as he is not only believes these traditions and current stories, but he has worked out in his own imaginings many notions of the marvellous power of the saint to minister to his own particular needs. And it is for this reason that the pilgrims come by thousands to the tomb of the Imam, not only for the merit they hope to gain by such a visit, but because they hope for some special blessing which may be obtained only by direct contact with the sacred place.

Under favourable conditions the pilgrim gets his first view of the Shrine of the Imam Rida at a point about sixteen miles from Meshed, and there is a saying that if a person can not see the golden dome from this vantage point, then evidently his spiritual vision has been dimmed by sin. Oftentimes they will pretend to see it when it is actually not visible, so as not to be unfavourably judged by their companions.

Within the city it is customary for anyone who crosses a street that leads to the Shrine, to stop and face in that direction and bow. Otherwise he would feel that he had been unmindful of the Imam.

Residents of the city of Meshed have not failed to take note of the demand of visitors for souvenirs to take home to friends and relatives who were not able to make the journey. They have provided various articles, many of which are supposed to possess magic power. One of the most popular and least expensive is the *sikka*, or brass bangle which has the name of

the Imam, *al Rida ibn Musa*, stamped in the middle, and the names of the "Five" (Muhammad, Ali, Hasan, Husain, and Fatima) are stamped along with the name Allah in the border. This little brass coin is used as a "good luck piece" in the purse, but it is also believed to have power to ward off the evil eye and to bring general good fortune to its possessor. Such pieces are not as much used as formerly, though they are often seen sewn on to children's clothing or on women's garments.

Pictures of the Imam, not much larger than a finger nail, are to be had in tiny silver frames. These are used as talismans and in worship. Other articles, such as vases, inkwells, jars, bowls, pots, etc., are made of a black stone that is available in the region of Meshed, and these make favourite souvenirs. This stone is powdered and used on burns, and a cure thus effected is considered a miracle of the Imam.

Prayer tablets, upon which they put their foreheads in the prostrations in their prayers, are made from clay that is taken near the Shrine. This idea was no doubt brought from Kerbala, where the believers attribute great power to the clay with which the blood of Husain was mixed. There the sale of these clay tablets has developed into a considerable business. The clay in Meshed however, does not have quite the same magic value as that from Kerbala, for here a tablet is supposed to be efficacious for only forty days, when a new one must be purchased.

Whatever is to be taken back to the pilgrim's home is first rubbed on the railing around the tomb, that it may partake of the holiness of the saint, or such personal effects are taken *tawaf*, i.e. they are taken around the tomb. Sugar, rice, and other dry foods are also thus made sacred and taken home especially for the sick. But the most treasured gift to an aged or infirm person is a winding sheet that has been rubbed on this railing and that has picked up some of the sacred dust in its folds, as the wearer of this shroud will be sure of forgiveness for all of his sins. These practices are very common, but they are not considered as coming from the Law.

The tomb of the saint is surrounded by two railings, the inner one of silver and the outer one of steel. The inner railing has a gate that is fastened by a lock of silver, and this lock is thought to possess special powers. Those who are

sick will crowd around in order to get near enough to reach through and take hold of it, believing that it will heal them. Those who have sick at home will frequently take a bowl or teapot full of water and pour its contents over the lock, catching the water again in another bowl. This now "holy water" is taken and given to the sick. Every drop is carefully kept.

The common custom of tying a piece of clothing to some sacred object is, of course, observed here also. These pieces of cloth may be seen tied to the railings, and also to the candlesticks of 'the forty lamps of Imam Rida'. These lamps are exceedingly sacred. The shreds of clothing represent vows, and each expresses the desire of someone for health, love, a child, or to find some lost article. Each individual has promised a return of some sort when the desire is fulfilled—i.e., if a woman's desire for a child is granted, she vows that she will not cut the child's hair for a given number of years, usually seven, and then she will send or bring the hair, or its weight in silver or gold, to the saint. For some longed for blessing they will promise a choice jewel, a much prized garment, a piece of rich embroidery or lace, a ring or bracelet, or some valuable heirloom, and a wealthy man may pledge a rich new gold embroidered covering for the tomb, or a huge gold censer to be hung from the ceiling. People who suffer with sore eyes will vow to place a pair of silver eyes on the door post if their trouble is cured. The door posts are full of these eyes, indicating fulfilled promises.

The idea that whatever comes in contact with the tomb partakes of its sacredness so possesses some people that they will pull hairs from their heads, or old men will pluck hairs from their beards, and wrap them in paper and throw them upon the tomb. They think that by virtue of some part of themselves being near the saint they, too, will partake of his favour, in renewed vigour or in restoration to health from some malady.

Others who are afflicted with paralysis, total blindness or some incurable disease, will tie a coarse black rope about the neck, with the other end tied to the railing, and declare that they will not leave the place until they are cured. Or they will come and vow that they will sleep at the foot of the tomb until they are made well. One man was known to have slept there for seven years and was then put out because he one

day expressed a doubt as to the value of what he was doing. A paralytic girl, having first been taken to a foreign doctor, who gave her medicines and instruction for massage, was brought to the Shrine and placed at the foot of the tomb. The medicine and massage were kept up, but this further effort was made to insure the cure. After a week or so she began to move her limbs slightly, and a few days later she was able to stand. A miracle had been performed and a great demonstration was made, drums were beaten, trumpets blown, and the whole court was illuminated. Those who were making the pilgrimage at the time understood that a miracle had happened and rushed to the scene of the wonder. They tore pieces from the garments the woman wore, until there was scarcely sufficient left to cover her, even the strings which were woven into the many little braids of her hair were torn out. These were all for talismans, for her very clothing was supposed to have partaken of the blessing granted to her, and would therefore have magic power.

The dust which collects on the tomb and on the railing is considered to be sacred. Though it is that which is produced by the constant tramping of feet, it is carefully swept up and sold in small quantities to pilgrims, and when they are making the circumambulation of the tomb, those who have sore eyes will put their fingers through the railing, to get a bit of this dust and rub it on their eyes. It is used also to cure burns or other wounds, and swellings, it is thought to possess the power to raise the dead and is often given to one in a swoon. It is rubbed under the arms of a corpse to lighten his burden of sin, and, as mentioned before, a shroud which has some of this dust gives undoubted assurance of forgiveness. And it is usually rubbed on the roofs of the mouths of new born babies so that they will be devout!

Every adult who dies in the holy city is carried by his friends around the tomb. This is a help to the dead, and it is also a work of merit for those who perform the task, which is done just after the body has been washed. It has been reported recently, however, that among other reforms the Government is requiring that this practice be discontinued.

The first night in the grave is so much dreaded by the Iranians that those who can afford it will have special prayers said for the dead in the Shrine. When asked what those will do who cannot afford these services, the one questioned

replied, "We will just have to endure the torture and examination"

It is believed that animals also make the pilgrimage. Camels and sheep are considered to be sacred,<sup>3</sup> so it is therefore natural for them to go to the Shrine. When one of them wanders into one of the sacred courts it is taken and put with the flocks that belong to the saint, and if the owner comes after it and it willingly goes with him he may have it, but if it refuses it remains in the possession of the Shrine. The camel, the sheep, and the cow, if harshly treated by their masters, will come to the saint and complain, and if the owner makes a promise to treat the animal well in the future and gives a sum of money for the coffers of the Shrine, he may have his animal.

Stones are thought to make the pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup> Many people will declare that time and again they have seen stones out on the desert road that are rolling toward the Shrine.

Giving alms in the sacred area is a particularly meritorious act. Water carriers who keep the drinking fountains filled will ask alms from pilgrims for the sake of, and in the name of, Husain and Abbas, for at Kerbala, when water was brought before them, they were denied the privilege of slaking their feverish thirst, and the water was given to a dog to drink before their eyes.

To the sacred pigeons in the courts wheat and barley may be given as a work of merit. And all these practices go to show that the faith of the mass of the people in this tomb at Meshed is very real, so that it is not surprising to hear that something like a hundred thousand pilgrims come annually to this sacred spot.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The five pillars of Islam are faith, prayer, alms, fasting and pilgrimage.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mulla Noruz Ali, *Tuhfat al Ridawiyah*. The Gift through the Imam Rida, lithographed in Persia 1871.

<sup>3</sup> Majlisi *Hilyat al Muttakin*, "The Ornament of the Pious" p 127 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See chapter on Stones.

## CHAPTER VII

### DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION

AMONG Iranian Muhammadans the beliefs, customs and ceremonial rites that are connected with death and burial have been much the same in all places, though in recent years they have been somewhat modified by the requirements of the present progressive Government

The common idea is that when a Muslim approaches death, Azra'il, the Angel of Death, will come at the command of God to take away his soul<sup>1</sup> According to the information given in the Koran (79 1), the angel does not ask permission and performs his work in a most painful manner Only once, the traditions relate, has he asked permission of a dying man to take his soul, and that was in the case of Muhammad The story is given at length,<sup>2</sup> how Azra'il came to Muhammad's house and stood at the door and called, "O members of the house of prophecy, I am a stranger, and I have come a long distance Permit me to enter" Then Fatima the Prophet's daughter went to the door and said, "My father is very sick, please excuse us" The angel waited a while and then called out the same thing, but in a louder voice Fatima again went to the door and asked to be excused, but the angel made the same request a third time, very loudly, and Fatima sank to the floor in fear Muhammad said to her, "Are you afraid of the one who wants to come in?" She answered, "God and his prophet know best" Then Muhammad said, "This is he who makes children orphans, women widows, and who up until now has never asked permission to enter a house, this is Azra'il, open the door for him" The angel was admitted and said, "Peace be unto you, O prophet of God, who sends his greetings to you The angels of heaven are awaiting your footsteps, they have decorated the Throne and all Paradise, and God told me to come and get your soul, *if you are willing* If you are not willing, you may live as long as the world stands, but if you wish, I have come to meet you" Muhammad replied, "I desire to go with you



before God, but wait till Gabriel comes I grieve for my people, and I want a promise from God that He will forgive the sinners among them" So they waited until Gabriel came, and Muhammad said to him, 'O Gabriel, where have you been, to leave me alone when I needed you? Why have you come so late?' Gabriel answered, "O prophet of God, I was commanded of God to ornament heaven, and to put out the fires of hell, and to arrange the armies of angels to await your coming God sends his greetings and says that he is desiring to see you, if you wish, bring your honourable presence before him, but if not you may remain as long as the world stands, the choice is with you" Muhammad answered, "Truly I desire to go to God, but I grieve for my people Take my greetings to God and say that my people are weak and sinful, and will He please forgive them for my sake" So Gabriel went away to heaven, found God, and related what Muhammad had said "Tell Muhammad," said God, 'that I will forgive the sinners among his people until he is pleased with me' Muhammad was satisfied, and again he addressed Azra'il, "I am ready, take my soul, for my work is done" Azra'il then began to remove Muhammad's soul He began with the toes and pulled very hard until he had the soul up to Muhammad's knees Then Muhammad said, 'Wait!' and the angel stopped pulling "Will you take the souls of my people in this painful way?" he asked The angel replied, "*Jan kandan* (taking life) is very difficult, and I am taking yours with gentleness and kindness God did not tell me to do it easily, but I am being exceptionally kind to you" Muhammad answered, "I beseech you that every pain you will cause in taking the souls of my people you will put upon me, so that they may be spared" Then the angel proceeded to take Muhammad's soul

The specially prepared Korans,' which have marginal notes, have written alongside the sura "Ya Sin," that every Muslim should either read this sura himself, or have it read to him, at the time of his death This will ease the pain, calm the fears, and make the "soul taking" bearable, and for every letter that is pronounced in the reading ten angels will descend and stand before him in order, and they will pray for his forgiveness At the washing of his body they will also be present, and they will follow after the bier in the

procession, and will attend his burial. Also his spirit will not leave the body until an angel of Paradise appears and gives him some of the heavenly sherbet to drink, then after he has satisfied his thirst, Azra'il will take his spirit. In the grave he will not thirst, and on the day of resurrection he will not need the water which the prophets will have ready for him <sup>4</sup>

What happens to the soul after it leaves the body is a matter over which there is divergence of opinion, but there is the general belief that though the spirit is taken out of the body, yet it hovers about until burial. Some say that it goes first before God, and that if it is clean it may approach Him, and if not He drives it away, others say it goes to heaven where it is examined, and then returns and hovers around the corpse until burial. The length of time which is consumed in this heavenly journey depends upon the sins that were committed in the flesh. If the deceased is regarded as having been exceptionally wicked, the burial will be delayed to give the soul time to answer all the questions that are put to it and to return. There are others who say that the souls of the good go directly to heaven, and those of the bad directly to hell, and that those of the descendants of the Prophet go to a very cold place, which is called *zam hurir* and which is in the most distant sphere of heaven. Still others say that souls go to a place that is midway between heaven and hell, a place called *Barzakh*, and there they remain till the Judgment Day when the accounting is done and it is made clear which belong to heaven and which to hell (39 70 75)

A dead body is regarded as unclean, and whoever touches it becomes polluted and is obliged to cleanse his whole body, so as soon as life has left the body the chin is bound up, the eyes are bandaged to keep them shut, and the corpse is put into the *tabut*, the box in which it is carried, and taken as soon as possible to the "dead washer". When it is first put into this box the dreaded "squeezing" begins, and continues until the bones are soft. If the deceased has been a great sinner, the *tabut* is like fire to him, and in the meantime his spirit is supposed to be flying about and crying out, "Why do you torment my body and where are you taking it?" Those who carry the corpse out of the room must stop three times while crossing the room, on account of this crying, but no mortal ear can hear it.

At the place where the dead bodies are washed the arms are flexed by rubbing, the clothing is removed and the body is put to soak, after which it is placed upon a stone and thoroughly cleansed. This is done by three baths, the first is called the *sidra* or lotus bath, the second the *kafur* or camphor bath, and the third the pure water bath. Then every orifice of the body is closed with cotton. In many cases an agate seal, with the names of the "Five" cut into it,<sup>5</sup> is put under the tongue, or a coin bearing the same names, or a rosary of unbaked clay from Kerbala, is placed in the hand. A ring with the names of the "Fourteen" <sup>6</sup> scratched or cut into it is put on a finger of the right hand, and a long prayer, which is called the *ahd namah* is forced into this hand<sup>7</sup> to show that the deceased is one of Muhammad's people. If he has kept anything as a token from a holy person, a piece of a garment, a hair or something that person has owned or touched, this is to be buried with him, also a tablet of clay from the grave of Husain in Kerbala may be included.

Two sticks about fifteen inches long are inserted under his armpits to help him rise to a reclining position in the grave so as to greet Ali when he comes. The legs are wrapped, a cloth is draped about the body and a second cloth is bound about the head, thus dressed, the entire body is wrapped in the winding sheet, which is tied up at the feet like a bag. Many people have verses of the Koran written upon the winding sheet to afford indisputable proof that the wearer is a Muslim.<sup>8</sup> When the body is washed and wrapped it is again put into the *tabut* and carried away, while this prayer is said, "God, this is your slave, he has come to you, we witness that he is a Muslim, let him associate with Muhammad and Muhammad's household." As the corpse is put back into the *tabut* the "squeezing" continues. It is believed by some that excessive weeping on the part of the mourners increases the "squeezing," although many claim that it is merely an act which stores up merit for the departed and for those who weep.

The final covering of the bier is usually a piece of Kashmir shawl, and some of those used over the biers of prominent men, whether holy or otherwise, are of exquisite beauty. Thus, with its stately covering, the bier is carried forth. There is merit in carrying it, and should the deceased be a holy person, in merely touching it, for men will readily leave their work in

order to touch their hands to the bier and to follow the procession for a few steps " Those who die in a city that contains the tomb of a noted saint have until very recently, when a Government order was issued forbidding it, had their remains carried around the tomb This act is meritorious also, both for the dead and for those who perform the circumambulation

The grave itself has been dug from east to west The hole goes straight down, with a niche at the bottom on the north side The one who has prepared the body for burial loosens the cloth which fastens it to the *tabut*, then takes it out of this box and lowers it into the grave It is put into the niche on its right side, with the face toward Mecca, and with a brick under its head The belief is that when the body is in the grave the "squeezing" increases tremendously, until the bones become powder Especially is this true if the deceased has indulged in unclean things, such as eating with Christians The "reader," who is presiding, prays and says to the dead, "To die is just, the scales are just, the examination which the angels conduct is just " The grave digger, who is in the grave while the reader says this, prods the corpse and asks if he understands The niche (*lahad*) is then walled up and the last brick to be put in place is directly in front of the face of the corpse This brick is called the *lahad* The grave is then filled with earth and the friends go away

At this point the soul, which has been away at its questioning, returns and enters the body so that it becomes alive It calls out to its friends and relatives, asking why they have put its body in such a tight place, but again they do not hear The revived body sneezes and repeats the twenty fourth verse of the sura "Ya Sin," "Verily in your Lord have I believed, therefore hear me," and sits up so quickly that it strikes its nose against the *lahad* so forcibly that it is broken and blood gushes from it This is why it is the custom in life to say the above verse always after sneezing, in order that the habit may be so well formed that it will be repeated automatically at this time And just at the time of the sneeze, the two angels of the grave, *Nakir* and *Munkir*, appear with fiery chains and burning torches, and the grave continues to "squeeze" *Nakir* says in a terrifying voice, "Who is your Lord?" The answer should be given, "God is One, not Two " *Munkir*, who is more kindly inclined, asks *Nakir* not to torment

the corpse too severely, but to allow it to answer more freely. Then the dead should say, "God is great." Should this be delayed, Nakir hits the body with his flaming torch and it becomes ashes. Again it is revived and Nakir asks, "Who is your prophet?" If the answer is, "Muhammad, the Apostle of God," all is well, but if the examined becomes confused and gives another answer or fails to answer, the body is again reduced to ashes, only to be revived and asked "Who is your Imam?" The usual answer is, "Ali the son of Muhammad's uncle and the eleven who sit in his place."<sup>10</sup> If the person during his life has had love in his heart as much as a single grain of mustard, Ali will appear to help him at this point. Some claim that Ali appears at the moment the friends leave the grave, while others say that at the time of the sneeze he is present, seated in a green chair. In any case, when Ali appears, he begins to teach the proper answers to the questions, whether the person has been saint or sinner, but if he has been too absolutely wicked he cannot learn even with Ali's assistance.

For three days after the burial the Koran is read above the grave, in order to remove or at least to lighten the torment. For the first night in the grave, while the examination is in progress, people of means will at times employ forty one prayer readers to read special prayers for the dead. For the first prostration the first sura is read and for the second the Throne verse, then Sura 97 is read ten times.<sup>11</sup> All of the merit of this reading goes to the dead, and as a result God removes all fear from the heart of the dead so that even in the midst of Nakir's torture it remains calm.

Callers, especially young priests frequent the house of mourning and are fed. This also brings merit for the dead. During the first three nights lights are kept burning upon the grave and upon the spot where "life went out," to cheer the bewildered spirit. There are some that believe that if the dead has been able to answer all the questions put to him including the names of the Twelve Imams in their proper order then the door of heaven opens and he enters. But if he cannot answer the door remains shut, Ali goes away, the angels again apply their torches, bind their fiery chains about his neck, and then they drag him to hell, where he remains till the Judgment Day.<sup>12</sup>

But in spite of all this work of merit the spirit of the dead

does not rest, for on the seventh night and the fortieth night after death, and one even year from the day of death, he comes back and sits on the roof of his own home and observes what has been done and is being done for the peace of his soul. If he is satisfied he says nothing, but if not, then he begs the family to perform deeds of mercy for his sake. He goes on to remind them that he took nothing with him, but left everything that he had for them, he tells them that now his soul is restless because they have not fed the poor, nor given to the priests, nor done other works for his peace. Those who believe this, and it seems the great majority do, rather than to be thus upbraided by the spirit of their departed, have made it a custom to give a feast on each of these nights. On other occasions prayer readers are hired to read and pray, or proxies may be sent to Mecca or to the tomb of one of the Imams. Special prayers should be provided for if the season falls at the time of famine or pestilence or some great catastrophe. Nine parts of the merit of all these performances go to the one who performs them and one part to the dead in whose name they are done.

The spirit is believed to return to the graveyard every Thursday afternoon and sit or stand by the grave of its former habitat. Accordingly it is a common custom for people to visit the graves of their dead on Thursday afternoons, to read the Koran, to pray, and to give to the poor, and there are certain foods also which are considered appropriate for these occasions. The common sweetmeat, halva, is placed on the grave so that the spirit may be pleased and refreshed by its fragrance, and for the same reason rose-water is sprinkled on the grave when they leave.

Many believe that the spirits sometimes go on a pilgrimage to Najaf, the place where Ali is buried, for after the year is passed and the spirit has no further desire to visit his body, and has given up hope of ever inhabiting it again, since it is now decayed, he leaves it until the Day of Resurrection.

### RESURRECTION

Israfil is the angel of the resurrection. It is said that he has a trumpet which reaches from the East to the West or from earth to heaven, and he is spoken of as the Master of the Trumpet. Since the day God created him he has stood with his eyes fixed on God and the trumpet to his lips, awaiting

the command to blow When the command comes and he blows, then all the living will die,<sup>13</sup> but since it will also be the Resurrection Day, all the dead will rise and present themselves for the accounting The Muslim gets his information about this day largely from the Koran "And the trumpet shall be blown, and lo ! they shall speed out of their sepulchres to their Lord",<sup>14</sup> and, "He will blow and the dead will rise",<sup>15</sup> and, "On that day there shall be a blast on the trumpet and all that are in the heavens, and all that are in the earth shall be terror stricken, save him whom God pleaseth to deliver, and all shall come in humble guise"<sup>16</sup>

There appears to be a difference of opinion as to how many blasts are to be blown In one place in the Koran two blasts are mentioned <sup>17</sup> "One day the disturbing trumpet blast shall disturb it which the second blast shall follow" Some of the Imams hold to two blasts, while others say there will be three The first is to make all afraid the second for all to die, and the third for all to rise from the grave Others say that when Israfil blows the first trumpet all will die except himself, then he will go to Jerusalem and face Mecca and God will command him to die God will then say, "Who is there now but myself?" And He will command the earth to be shaken, the mountains to be made level and everything to become new, a vast plain with no vegetation, as it was in the beginning He will place his throne upon the water, as it was in the beginning, and He will say, "Who is King today?" When there is no answer, He will declare, 'I am He who made all alive and who made all dead I am He than whom there is no other I created and made alive' He will then take the trumpet and blow a blast, and everything that has ever been born from the beginning of the earth will again become alive The four angels who had held up God's throne will go to their places and the throne will again be lifted up and mankind will be ready for the accounting

There is a vivid description in the Koran of the work of separating the good and the bad on the last day <sup>18</sup> "And by *troops* shall the unbelievers be driven towards Hell, until when they reach it its gates shall be opened It shall be said to them, 'Enter ye the gates of Hell, therein to dwell forever' But those who feared their Lord shall be driven on by troops to Paradise, until when they reach it, its gates

shall be opened, and its keepers shall say to them, All hail ! virtuous have ye been enter then in, to abide herein forever ' ' "

Another idea is that all mankind will on that day be gathered together on a desert The sun, which will have come very near the earth, will appear to be " ten feet across " and will shine upon the heads of all with such intensity that their eyes will be forced to the tops of their heads And all will thirst with a terrible thirst, but the Imams will be there with basins of water to give to the faithful

There are precautionary measures however, that can be taken during life against this day and its unbearable suffering The one who is in the habit of reading the sura " Ya Sin " will not need any water, the sura will be an intercessor before God, for He will not account with the one who reads it He will be forgiven, and more than that he will himself be made an intercessor for many others Other suras and verses have similar powers Whoever reads the third sura, " Imran " will be kept on the bridge of Sirat, and whoever reads the seventh sura, " Araf," every month, need have no fear on the Day of Resurrection, and if he reads it every Friday he will be excused from the accounting and God will put a curtain between him and the Devil and Adam will be his deliverer If the fifth sura, " The Table " is read forty one times, the thirst and hunger of the last day will not affect the reader Muhammad said that the benefit of reading the eighth sura, " Spoils," was that he himself would become the reader's saviour and give him strength and remove all his suffering on the Day of Resurrection

At the accounting in the desert Muhammad comes with Fatima and the Twelve Imams Fatima tells the women that all those who have wept for her son Husain, and have kept their tears,<sup>1</sup> will have great merit and will go to heaven, then the women will take hold of the fringe of her garment, for she will wear a gorgeous fringe on this day, and away they will go like a flash of lightning across the bridge of Sirat, " which is narrower than a hair and sharper than a razor's blade " The bad will drop off and fall into hell, but the good will be able to hold on and will be carried across safely Muhammad will perform the same service for the men and " whosoever loves Ali," these Hasan and Husain will cause to enter Paradise, where they will drink of the River of Milk <sup>2</sup>



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sura 79 1

*Rawdat al Shuhada* p 66 and *Hayat al Kulub* p 435

<sup>3</sup> See chapter on The Koran

<sup>4</sup> The tank of Kosair is said to be a cistern of water in Paradise of which Ali is the keeper On the Day of Resurrection all of the prophets and the Imams will be present with bowls of water from Kosair to give to the thirsty newcomers

<sup>5</sup> Cf chapter on Saints Saiyids and Pilgrimage

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad his daughter Fatima and the Twelve Imams constitute the Fourteen mediators for those of the Shi'ite faith

<sup>7</sup> *Zad al Ma'ad* ch x

<sup>8</sup> In the *Rawdat al Shuhada* it is related that when Muhammad's first wife Khadija, was near death she asked Muhammad to wrap her in the clothes he wore when the revelation came to him so that she would have no trouble in the grave Gabriel heard her request and said it was not necessary because she had given her property to the work of God and for this reason a winding sheet from heaven would be sent down to her

<sup>9</sup> Complete directions for carrying a corpse and for its burial may be found in the *Zad al Ma'ad* ch xiii

<sup>10</sup> The names of the Twelve Imams in their order of succession are Ali Hasan Husain Ali Asghar Muhammad Bakir, Ja'far Sadik, Musa Rida Takī, Naki Hasan Askari and the Mahdi

<sup>11</sup> This is the sura of Power the place of origin of which has been considered doubtful

<sup>12</sup> Sura 39 70 75

<sup>13</sup> Sura 39 68

<sup>14</sup> Sura 36 51

<sup>15</sup> Sura 27 89

<sup>16</sup> Sura 20 102

<sup>1</sup> Sura 79 6 7

<sup>18</sup> Sura 36 71 73

<sup>19</sup> See chapter on Saliva Breath Tears etc

<sup>20</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada* p 153

## CHAPTER VIII

### ANGELS

ANGELS are real beings to the Iranians and are believed to be exceedingly numerous. God is always creating them, for since every drop of rain is accompanied by an angel, the supply in heaven would soon be exhausted were it not in some way increased. However, when a person makes a pilgrimage to any holy place, God creates an angel at every step the pilgrim takes and these new angels accompany him on his way. There are angels on the two shoulders of every individual, and though they bear the same names in every case, they are different beings for each person, hence new ones must be created with the birth of every child. There are also myriads of other angels who frequent places of worship and who are spoken of as the "happy angels." It is believed that there are seventy thousand of these hovering over the shrine of the Imam Rida in Meshed.

Angels are regarded as spirits, and it is said that they have bodies of light and that they are pure. That they possess knowledge is shown by the tradition that Ali, the first Imam, has been their teacher, for Gabriel himself was instructed by him.<sup>1</sup>

Many books narrate stories of angels and their relations to mankind. "The Wonders of Creation," by Kazwini, goes into considerable detail regarding the different groups of angels, their leaders and other great ones among them, so this book is much prized by the Iranians and is to be found in many homes. Even the common people speak with information about the angels and mention them by name.

Another book which is much read in religious gatherings is the "Book of Angels" by Sabzawari. In this book, and in the "Wonders of Creation" the greatest of all the angels is called "Ruh," or Spirit. Sabzawari says of him that he has the work of the whole world in his hands, the air, the earth and the water. He has 70,000 heads and each of these has 70,000 tongues and each tongue can speak 70,000 languages.

Some claim that Jibra'il, Gabriel, is this Spirit, for in the Koran Gabriel is spoken of as God's messenger<sup>2</sup> and as the Holy Spirit<sup>3</sup> Next in greatness is Israfil he breathes life into man and is considered to be the Angel of the Resurrection, and is called the "Master of the Trumpet," for it is he who shall blow the trumpet at the last day The opening of the bell of his trumpet is the size of the earth and heaven, and he is standing by the Throne of God Ever since he was created he has stood there and has kept his eyes upon God, awaiting the command to blow his trumpet He has four wings and with one of them he can cover the whole earth

Other angels, who have outstanding functions as individuals, are Mika'il, the angel of sustenance, and Azra'il, the Angel of Death

There are four angels who uphold the throne of God, one bears the shape of man and prays for sustenance for mankind, another is like a cow and prays for all animals which assist mankind, a third is like a vulture and prays for all birds, and the fourth is like a lion and prays for all beasts of prey These four angels possess special healing as well as intercessory powers, they are the most beloved of God and all the other angels salute them and honour and love them The Koran<sup>4</sup> says that on the Day of Judgment there will be eight of these especially beloved angels present

Each of the seven heavens has its particular angels, which are ruled by a chief, those of the first heaven are like cows and their chief is Isma'il, those of the second are like eagles and their chief is Mika'il, those of the third are like vultures and their chief is Sarda'il, and those of the fourth are like horses and Salsa'il is their chief Those of the fifth are like houris, very white and beautiful, with black eyes, the whites of which are remarkably white, and Kalkhail is their chief, those of the sixth heaven are like boys and Tamkhail is their chief, and finally the angels of the seventh heaven are like human beings and their chief is Ruyail

Above the seven heavens are many curtains and beyond these there are myriads of angels, so many that they cannot know one another They praise God, each in his own language, with voices that would render the hearer insensible There are also the *Karrubyan*, cherubim, who unceasingly and everlastingly praise God, and that without weariness There is no empty space in all the heavens that is larger than a

span, on account of the innumerable<sup>5</sup> angels who are prostrating themselves before God

The story of Harut and Marut is well known<sup>6</sup> They were two angels who lacked sympathy for the weakness of mankind, and they were sent to earth to see whether they would be able to resist human temptations They both sinned, and Kazwini tells us in his 'Wonders of Creation' that as punishment for their sin they were suspended with heads downward in a well near Babylon, and there they still hang and teach magic to mankind

The angels which most intimately concern the Muhammadan as an individual are the two personal ones which sit on his shoulders through life, and the two who meet him and examine him in the grave The two on the shoulders are named Ragib and Atid One of these writes down the good deeds and the other the bad ones These records are kept, for the deeds are to be weighed on the Judgment Day and the fate of the person is to be determined by whichever weight is in excess The two angels in the grave, Nakir and Munkir are described in the chapter on Death and Burial

The portraits of all believers, *i e* Muhammadans, are said to be reflected upon the throne of God At the time of their devotions, when they prostrate themselves or when they have performed good deeds, the pictures are pleasing, but when they have sinned, or neglected the stated prayers they are ugly At such times God covers them however, so that the angels cannot see them and be made ashamed and unhappy

The earth, as well as the heavens, is believed to be filled with angels, who are engaged in praising God, and the spot on the earth where they perform this act receives a blessing A lady who is devout in her Muhammadan faith says that the angels no longer come to her house since she has been living with her nephew, because he keeps a dog<sup>1</sup> Consequently her blessing is lacking

Angels not only bring blessings to mankind but they assist them in many ways There are those along with Mika'il who preside over sowing and reaping and are responsible for rain and snow There are others who cause the winds to blow, and still others who make the sun to rise Almost every form of work has angels who are helping and guarding those engaged in it Some angels are responsible for unborn

babes, and still others for nursing babies, for example, a mother does not cut the finger nails of her new born child because she believes the angels will do it

In Sura 13 12 we read, "Each hath a succession of angels before him and behind him, who watch over him by God's behest" Accordingly, it is claimed that each Muslim has 160 angels who look after his personal needs, and the Prophet Muhammad knew all of these beings Seven of this number take care of the individual's eyes, they protect them from accident and remove foreign bodies from them Several others assist in the process of digestion, they see to it that the food which has been eaten makes new blood and flesh and strengthens the bones and other parts of the body In this manner all the bodily functions are attended by definite groups of angels

The following story illustrates the belief that angels help to keep things clean Previous to the Pahlevi regime, a newly appointed Governor to Khorasan was receiving guests Among them was a Muslim priest (mulla) The conversation turned to the subject of smoking The mulla maintained that the *galyan*, or water pipe, was the best of all smokes, and more than that, it was majestic in appearance The Governor conceded the superior looks of the water pipe, but added that he preferred the cigarette because it was his own, while the water pipe, as it was passed from mouth to mouth, became a carrier of disease The mulla answered that there was no danger whatsoever, because the angels came and cleansed the stem after each smoker

There are angels also whose special work is intercession, and there are others who assist the sinner to repent, still others are present at the morning and evening prayers and make reports of the believer's worship and determine the merit of which he is considered to be worthy

The traditions contain many stories of crises in which angels were the allies of men It is said that when Ali went to war God always sent with him two of the most powerful angels, to hold his hand when he lifted his mighty sword, *dhu l fakar* Had they not done so, not only would the enemy have been cut asunder, but his horse, the earth, the bull that holds the earth on its horns, the fish upon which the bull stands and everything would have been destroyed Also, when at the battle of Uhud, Ali was about to strike an enemy with his

mighty sword, God ordered Gabriel to quickly spread his wing and break the force of the blow. Gabriel did spread his wing and saved the world, but it is related that he lost many feathers!

In their heavenly forms angels are never seen by men, but it is claimed that when the Mehdi finally appears jinn and angels both will be visible. Muhammad once asked Gabriel to come to him in his angelic shape. Gabriel told him that he would not be able to endure the grandeur, but Muhammad insisted, and when he looked upon Gabriel in his glory he fainted.

Gabriel himself is the subject of many stories, as he has appeared to different individuals. He came in the form of Jacob to comfort Joseph when he was in the well,<sup>7</sup> and frequently took the form of *Dehya*, one of Muhammad's close friends. He was extremely fond of the two grand children, Hasan and Husain, and in this guise he would come and take care of them. If they cried in the night when their mother was asleep he would rock their cribs and quiet them. He often brought them grapes and pomegranates from heaven. There was an angel that appeared on the field of Kerbala with a green bottle, in which he caught Husain's blood. They say he was Gabriel.

Some people believe that angels assume any and every shape, except that they do not come as swine or dogs. When Hasan and Husain were very small they were lost one day in the desert. The story is related by one of Muhammad's pupils, Mikdad ibn Aswad,<sup>8</sup> that when the Prophet found the boys they were asleep and a huge snake was circled around them. The snake spoke and said, "Don't be afraid, I am an angel and have come to protect the children."

Muhammad said that the sura "Cattle" came down from heaven all at once, accompanied by 70,000 angels. If a person reads it every day and night, 1,000 angels will speak the forgiveness of his sins. In like manner God will send 1,000 angels to guard and to pray for the one who reads the "throne verse," and the four verses following. When a person is dying, if someone reads the sura "Ya Sin," angels will be present.

It is related that when Muhammad died there were troops of angels on the scene, and that they rode upon spotted horses. Other angels wept so loudly that the sound of their mourning

rose above God's throne and was heard even by mankind.<sup>9</sup> Many other times, when calamity befell one of the faithful, both angels and jinn wept

A common conception of the cause of rainfall, until quite recently, was that Mika'il got a cloud from the sea which is under God's throne, and that he and other angels who are his assistants, dipped up the water and poured it down where God commanded

A middle aged Iranian gentleman related a story to give the explanation of rain and thunder and lightning. He had heard it when he was a boy in school from his teacher, a large turbaned, long bearded, deep voiced mulla, who taught school with a club. According to this story there is a little angel, smaller than a bee, who rides the clouds with whip in hand. God tells him to mount a particular cloud and drive it over a designated place and cause it to rain there. The little angel obeys. Sometimes the cloud is stubborn and will not go where it should. Then the angel uses his whip and lashes the cloud so violently that the strokes cause fire, which makes a great roar, hence the lightning and thunder

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Tarikh Namah*, p 14

<sup>2</sup> 81 19

<sup>3</sup> 16 104

<sup>4</sup> 69 17

<sup>5</sup> *Ajayib al Makhlukat*, p 88

<sup>6</sup> 2 96

<sup>7</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada* p 25

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Sa'd *Tabakat* iv 1 p 174

<sup>9</sup> *Hayat al Kulub*, pp 430 433 and *Rawdat al Shuhada* pp 66 67

## CHAPTER IX

### SACRIFICES

Let me become your sacrifice !

THE custom among the Iranians of offering sacrifices is ancient. It is said to have originated in Abraham's offering of Isma'il,<sup>1</sup> though some say it goes back to the offerings made by Cain and Abel. But whatever the beginning of the custom it has found its place in the established practices of Islam, and it is still regarded as a significant act of faith.

The great feast of sacrifice, which is called the *Aid i Kurban*, falls on the tenth day of the last month of the Muhammadan year and is in commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, the son he had by Hagar. In Teheran it was formerly customary on this day to sacrifice a camel in public. The animal was provided by the Shah and was killed by one of his men with a spear. This man was called a *shatr*, or runner. As soon as the animal was killed the flesh was cut into tiny pieces, and these were given out, as long as they lasted, to the throng of those who rushed to get it, for the meat was regarded as sacred, and it was used for healing, or eaten with the idea of obtaining special desires. But this public sacrifice of the camel was forbidden in 1933.

However, the observation of the feast of sacrifice has other features that are continued. In every Muslim home throughout the land it is supposed that a victim will be sacrificed. In well to do families it should be at least a sheep or a lamb, and even in many of the poorer homes a lamb will be slain, though a fowl is more likely to be used. The victim must be fat, without a blemish and not more than six months old, and it should be prepared in special ways for the ceremony. Its eyelids should be blackened, for it is said that Isma'il's eyelids were blackened before Abraham took him with him into the mountain. A piece of rock candy is put into its mouth and its head is turned towards Mecca, and the slayer, who is usually a butcher, says, "In the Name of God !" and "O God, accept this sacrifice as thou didst accept the offering



of Thy Friend Abraham ” Then he kills it with a knife and skins it

Sacrifice may be made either for the living or for the dead, and on the Day of Judgment, whether the victim be beast or fowl, for the person for whom it is sacrificed it will become a mount on which he may ride in safety across the bridge of Sirat This idea is attributed to the Prophet himself

For the dead, sacrifices should be made at least once a year by the wealthy and by those who have been to Mecca The poor also frequently try to make this sacrifice

The dried eyes,<sup>2</sup> which are so widely employed as charms against the evil eye, are from the victims of the annual feast of sacrifice, no others are possessed of the magic power But the eyes of animals which have been sacrificed for the dead should never be taken out, for then in their blindness they would never be able to see their way across the narrow bridge The living may take the risk for themselves, however, and remove the eyes of those victims which are sacrificed for them, for since the rich sacrifice several animals each year they can risk digging out the eyes of a number of their victims Then after these eyes have been dried they are sold for charms It is said that this practice has no sanction from any tradition of the prophets or the Imams, but that it became a custom because certain priests permitted or suggested it There appears to be little definite information about it

The meat from the annual sacrifice should all be given away, and there is no so called “ sacrifice for sin,” although Husain and the members of his family who were killed at Kerbala are generally regarded as having been sacrificed for Muslims Husain is sometimes spoken of as having accomplished atonement for them

The *akika* is a sacrifice that is to be performed on the seventh day after the birth of a child It is part of the fulfilling of the Law,<sup>3</sup> and all Muslim parents should do it to ensure long life for the child and wealth for themselves A sheep, a hen or a dove, according to the ability of the parents, may serve for this sacrifice <sup>4</sup> If the parents neglect it on the seventh day it may be done later, or the individual himself, if he has survived, may have it done even when he is grown, but the common belief is that if the parents do not attend to it at the proper time the child will probably never live to have it done for himself It is frequently said that those who have

lost many children have neglected the *akika*. Many believe that God is especially pleased with this service and that the choicest blessings for their children are obtained only through the shedding of blood.

The order of the ceremony is as follows. An animal is chosen that is without blemish, and after they repeat "God is Great," this animal is killed.<sup>5</sup> The Imam Ja'far Sadik pronounced that the preliminary declaration should be, "In the name of God, and God of Gods, this is the *akika* belonging to — Its flesh to his flesh, its blood to his blood, and its bone to his bone. O God, let him be a protector of the household of Muhammad." This statement also he says should follow, "I loathe those who give a partner to you, I turn my face to God, who opened the sky and the earth." Then the one who has slain the victim blows his breath towards it and proceeds to skin it. Not a bone should be broken, and all the flesh should be given away, and not less than ten believers should eat of it, but the father and the mother of the child should not taste it. The midwife deserves a portion, and if there should have been no midwife, then that part becomes the mother's and she may give it to whomsoever she chooses. These customs will vary slightly in detail, according to the status of the family and the locality.

At the time of the *akika* the hair of the child is cut and weighed, and its weight in gold or silver is given to a shrine or in alms.

The sacrifice for the sick is similar to the *akika*. First this prayer is repeated, "O God, this lamb which you have given me is for you. I sacrifice it for your servant— Accept the meat of it for his flesh and the blood of it for his blood, and, O God, accept it as you accepted Abraham's sacrifice."<sup>6</sup> The slayer then blows into the lamb's ear, the *takbir* ("God is Great") is repeated three times, "In the Name of God" is said three times, and the victim is killed. The place of the sacrifice must be "under the sky," a place that is clean and not too near where people pass, for no one should step in the blood, as the blood is usually allowed to run out upon the ground, although it is conceded that it is better to put it into a hole. The entrails should be buried, but the feet should be left on the body and the skin should not be torn. The flesh should be cut into fifty seven pieces and given to the poor. The eyes may be eaten, and sometimes they are,

but if a person has a brother this is considered to be unwise, for it may cause harm to come to him The bones should all be buried

According to an ancient custom, but one which is said not to have been sanctioned by the Prophet or the Imams, they sometimes put blood on the threshold of the door so that no harm may enter the house

Sacrifices are made also on several other occasions, viz , when starting on a journey, when a family moves into a new house, when a dear friend arrives for a visit, when a guest of honour comes to a city, at a wedding and when a bride enters her husband's house

When cholera or plague has appeared in any particular place, a black lamb may be sacrificed with the following prayer, ' O God, for the sake of Muhammad, for the sake of Gabriel, Michael, and Israfil, and for the sake of Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain, keep us, keep us, and our sons and our friends and all believers, from plague and from cholera ! O Keeper, O Keeper, save us ! O Apostle, remove our sorrow !''<sup>7</sup>

Often at a time when a town or a village wishes to show honour to a guest, an ox will be elaborately garlanded and brought before him, ostensibly to be killed in his presence The guest, who understands that the honour has already been paid him by this act, gives the signal to take the animal away His gesture is usually obeyed and no such sacrifice is made

There are sacrifices also to the jinn and to the *peri* (fairies), but on these occasions fowls are usually employed

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Islam says that Abraham did not offer Isaac Cf Koran and the *Rawdat al Shuhada* p 15

<sup>2</sup> Cf chapter on The Evil Eye

<sup>3</sup> *Hilyatu l Muttakin* pp 40 41

<sup>4</sup> *Majma al Dawat* p 9

<sup>5</sup> *Miftah i Jinan* p 255

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p 71 and *Majma al Dawat* p 8

<sup>7</sup> *Miftah i Jinan* p 79

## CHAPTER X

### THE KÁF MOUNTAIN AND RELATED BELIFFS

As recently as 1910 a young man who had graduated from the American school in Teheran, and had gone to his home town to teach, was obliged to close his school because of the opposition which he had aroused by teaching that the earth is round. And some years later, at the home of an Iranian teacher in Meshed, the younger brother, a man of twenty six years, who possessed a keen desire for any 'new information' and who was proud of any progress he had made in the sciences, came into the women's quarters, where his mother and sister in law were receiving foreign guests, and proceeded to show the women how great his knowledge was and how widely he had read. He talked about physics and geography, and finally he said, "And do you know that it has now been proven that the earth is round?" No doubt his family and acquaintances regarded him as entirely too liberal minded, for such opinions are wholly contrary to the Muslim idea of the universe. The accepted belief that the earth is a plane which is surrounded by the Kaf mountain is still held by the mass of the people. In 1932 an Iranian lady acquaintance was told by a neighbour that she was speaking blasphemy when she said the earth was round like a ball.

The Kaf mountain provides the setting for many fantastic stories, which are known by all classes of "believers". By much repeating these stories have become changed, and, because it is impossible in most cases to reproduce them as they have been variously related by the women, they are told here much in the way in which they may be found in the printed books of traditions. Inseparably connected with the stories of the mountain are the tales of Yajuj and Majuj (Gog and Magog), of Alexander the Great, of Khizr and of others who have drunk of the water of life<sup>1</sup>.

According to commentators on the Koran, the earth is a plane and the Kaf mountain surrounds it<sup>2</sup>. The Amir Shir Ali Khan Ludi, in the time of Shah Jahan Hindi, related that

in the book by Ya'kubī Hamavī it is written that the mountain of Kāf is so high that a space equal only to half the stature of a man remains between its peaks and heaven<sup>3</sup> The mountain itself is made of emerald and the green and blue of the sky are its reflections, but according to the tradition<sup>4</sup> there are five mountains connected with Kaf, and all the strata of all the other mountains on the earth are united with it When God desires to send an earthquake as a punishment to any part of the earth, he orders the angel who is the guardian of the mountain to cause the particular stratum that is connected with that part to shake violently<sup>5</sup> In the *Haft Ikhlām*, or "Seven Climes," it is stated that at the top of the mountain there is a mine of red sulphur, which is supposedly gold This glows at night and smokes in the daytime Its heat is so great that it can melt iron Some say that the rulers of Greece had a secret whereby they rubbed their implements with a substance which protected the iron from this intense heat, and thus they were able to mine the sulphur It is claimed, however, that no engineer has ever found the Kaf mountain and that no one knows really where it is

One of the miracles of Ali<sup>6</sup> was that he took several persons over the Kaf mountain One of these was Salman ī Farsī<sup>7</sup> They went at night and proceeded to the two peaks, Jabal Gah and Jabal Sah on the other side of the mountain There they found 70,000 cities and in each city there were 70,000 mosques, in each mosque were 70,000 prayer niches, and in each niche was Ali leading the prayers And when Salman ī Farsī returned and went to Ali's house, behold there was Ali asleep in his bed This miracle is cited to prove Ali's omnipresence

It is said also that whenever Ali drew his great sword, *dhu'l farkar*, the mountain of Kaf trembled<sup>18</sup>

Majlisī writes that the race of Yajuj and Majuj dwell on the other side of Kaf These creatures have tongues like saws or rasps, and they lick up the mountain every night and each morning it is replaced, and it is believed that they would have broken through and come to this side of the mountain long ago if Alexander the Great had not built one hundred walls to keep them out<sup>9</sup> Men who lived near the mountain reported to Alexander that they were constantly being threatened by Yajuj and Majuj, and they asked him to build a protection for them Alexander replied that if they would

provide the power he would help. To this they agreed, and he commanded them to bring huge quantities of iron and to heat it until it was red hot. Then he added seven other metals and the resulting alloy was put in place, as some say, into a dam or wall, while others say onto the top of the mountain. This alloy was so smooth that when the tribe of Yajuj and Majuj tried to climb up the side they always slipped back, and it was so hard that they could make no impression upon it with their tongues.

Also it is stated in the *Mirat al Khwal* that there is a world on the other side of Kaf which contains many creatures, but concerning the truth of their being and the nature of their condition, no one knows but God. Some say that it is the abode of the tribes of jinn and peri,<sup>10</sup> and that the fabulous bird Simurgh had its home there. A favourite story regarding the peoples of this realm is that when Alexander conquered the world he went to Kaf. He sent a slave up the mountain to explore, and when the slave got to the top there came up from the other side another slave just like him. So a second slave was sent up, and then another and another, and each time one just like him would come up from the other side. At last Alexander himself went up and, behold, another Alexander came up from the other side. This saddened Alexander greatly, for he had believed himself to be master of everything, but now he knew that there were other worlds and other conquerors, and he died of disappointment.

One tradition says that when the Day of Resurrection is near, a hundred tribes of Yajuj and Majuj will be set free, and from every hill and valley they will rush down like wild animals among the inhabitants of this earth, and all unbelievers will stare and cry out, "Woe ! woe !"

The traditionist Majlisi says,<sup>11</sup> that before Israfil blows the trumpet, certain significant things will happen. One of these is the appearance of the Yajuj and Majuj, and the Koran gives witness to this in the sura that is called the "Cave," and when they come, the dam which Alexander built to keep them out will be laid low. Both Yajuj and Majuj are nations, says Huzaifa, a disciple of Muhammad, and each is composed of four hundred tribes. The men have such longevity that some will see a thousand generations. Among them are three distinct varieties of individuals, first the giants, then those whose height and girth are equal and whom no metal

or mountain can withstand, and, finally those who have long ears, who are called *gihm gush*, or "carpet eared" One of the ears is used for a mattress upon which to lie, and the other serves as a blanket with which to cover These creatures eat all sorts of animals, including the elephant, the lion and the pig And when one of themselves dies he is eaten by his companions

They will make their first appearance in Syria, will move toward the east and will end in Khorasan, and they will drink dry the eastern rivers and the Sea of Mazandaran (Caspian) Majlisi continues to state that there is nothing more from the accepted traditions about them which can be regarded as true He has no doubt, however, as to their existence, and as to the time and manner of their appearing, because it is so stated in the Koran, and this must be believed rather than the word of those with no religion who say that there are no such creatures

In the vicinity of Kaf there is said to be a dark region, Zulmat, from which flows the water of life, and which is the source of strange stories It is located in the west, near the place where the sun descends into the well, and where there is no light whatsoever The ground about it is very hot, and whoever approaches must wear special shoes that will not burn

Khawji Khizr, who was one of the few to have drunk from the spring of the water of life, is its keeper, and no one can go near the spring or drink from it without his express permission

Alexander heard of this water of life and desired to drink of it so that he too might never die Accordingly he chose forty men from among his horsemen to go with him When they drew near the place they saw an old man who asked them where they were going "To Zulmat," they replied He told them that they could not go without his permission and guidance, so they requested the permission, which was straightway given He also informed them how to protect their feet and showed them the way to the spring With great discomfort and difficulty, however, they went on through the dense darkness, always carefully obeying the instructions of the old man, until they reached the spring Alexander filled the bottle which he had brought with him and made his way back through the darkness When he emerged from this weird blackness, he hung his bottle on a tree, but a crow came and drank from it and overturned the bottle,

so that the water of life ran down the trunk of the tree And so it is that the crow never dies, and that the tree became evergreen, and that Alexander failed to drink !

But while they were at the spring, some of the men gathered a few pebbles, and when they looked at them in the light they beheld that each pebble was a pure gem Then those who had not gathered them were exceedingly sorry, and there were also those who regretted that they had not gathered more, so Alexander decided to return to the spring But this time the old man was not to be found

Khizr, Elias (Elijah), Otad, Abdal and Aktab, and a few others whose names are not commonly known, are the only ones who have ever drunk of the water of life They are all alive now, and though *invisible*, they are believed to give help to mankind when in trouble The group is called *Rajal al Gharb*, ' the hidden men,' and, like the Imams, they are mediators between men and God It is by means of them that the grace of God is brought to men, and when a person is in danger of sudden death if he appeals to them he will be saved Khawjī Khizr is looked upon as the ruler of the sea, and his good offices are invoked to protect ships that are in peril Some say that he and Elias (Elijah) are the same person, but in the *Kisas al Anbiya* they are mentioned as different In fact it is stated that the two of them were together at the house of the widow Zarapta and also at the dam of Yajuj and Majuj

But the whole group of these " hidden men " are said to be always together, sometimes at one point of the compass and sometimes at another By using the *abjad*, which is a name for the system that gives the numerical values of the letters of the alphabet, along with the names for the Arabic months, there is a way for people to determine their location at any time But of course this mathematical exercise has been done for them, and there is a diagram to be found in the current almanac which shows just where the " hidden men " are each day of the month When the location is determined, the suppliant who is in grave danger faces in that direction, gives the salaam and cries, " Save me ! save me ! "

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Khawjī Khizr is the name of a prophet who the Orientals say is still living and sometimes appears to travellers who have lost their way He is said to have accompanied Alexander the



Great to the dark regions of Zulmat, where he was told he would find the Water of Life" (Beale, Oriental Biographical Dictionary,' p 217)

<sup>2</sup> See descriptions of Kaswini in the *Ajáyib al Makhlukát*

<sup>3</sup> Cf ' Káf ' in the *Mirát al Khidál*

<sup>4</sup> Cf " Káf " in the *Ajáyib al Makhlukát*

<sup>5</sup> Cf Káf in the *Kisás al Anbyá*

<sup>6</sup> Khawnsari, *Khulásat al Akhbár*

<sup>7</sup> Donaldson, "Salman the Persian" *Moslem World*, vol xix, p 351

<sup>8</sup> *Hilyatu l Muttakin* see Yajuj and Majuj

<sup>9</sup> Rodwell's Koran, p 188 note and see Sura 18 92 101

<sup>10</sup> See chapter on the Jinn

<sup>11</sup> *Majlisi Hakkal Yakín*, p 197

## CHAPTER XI

### SEASONS AND WEATHER

THE time between the winter solstice and the vernal equinox is divided into several periods, each of which has its own peculiar characteristics, although almost invariably each one overlaps another. The period between December 21st and January 30th is called the "Big Forty," that from January 31st until February 20th is called the "Little Forty." In the later period the days and nights are both counted, *i.e.* twenty days and twenty nights. The Big Forty is supposed to bring most of the rain and snow of the winter, but if it fails to do so, then the Little Forty is sure to make up the shortage. The last four days of the Big Forty and the first four of the Little Forty are called the *char char*, "four, four," and it is said that during these eight days the two periods engage in a fight which produces exceedingly bad weather.

*The Breathing of the Earth* Ideas regarding the breathing of the earth vary with the locality. There are some who claim that during the last four days of the Little Forty the earth begins to breathe, and for the four days following it breathes openly. In Khorasan the villagers say that the earth awakes about the first of the Little Forty and breathes for the first time five or six days later. At this time also the trees breathe secretly from the tips of their branches. The second breathing of the earth is at the end of the Little Forty.

The period that embraces the last ten days of the Big Forty and all of the Little Forty is called *Bahman*,<sup>1</sup> the name of an ancient month. Then comes *Isfand*, the month when the lambs are born, and the common people say that the month took its name from *gusifand*, or sheep. The weather during this time is also changeable. They have a rhyme which characterizes this weather.

Mah i Isfand ast wa si fand ast  
Har sa ati yaik fand ast

It is the month of Isfand and thirty kinds of weather  
Every hour is a different kind

If on the last day of Bahman there should be hail and thunder, it will be a sure sign of good crops. After this comes the Vernal Equinox, which is the Iranian New Year's Day. The weather remains changeable, but it gradually gets warmer. The last ten days of this period are expected to be cold, and for four or five additional days a cold north wind blows, which is called the *bad i pr i zan*, or "the old woman's wind." Stories about this wind are not always the same, but the one most frequently heard is that at the time of Muhammad there was an old woman who possessed one female camel. One spring this camel failed to be with young at the usual time, so the old woman came to the Prophet and asked him to pray that God would give five more cold days so that her camel might foal. The prayer was answered with five cold, windy days, and this wind has continued to blow every spring since that time, and it is very auspicious for camels.

The four days following the new year are said to be symbolic of the four seasons.

The hottest part of the summer, from the last of June through July and into August, is called by the ancient name *Tummu*. This is the time when gardens suffer, when gardeners steal water and when many fights occur over the water rights.

*Rain*—The rainless season lasts approximately six months. Rains are supposed to come after the beginning of the new year, on the sixth, the sixteenth, the twenty sixth, and so on until the seventy sixth day after. If all of these come the rainy season would close early in June, however, the rains seldom come according to that schedule, and the last shower usually falls between the middle and the end of May, and the people expect the long drought to be broken in the sign of the Scorpion, which falls in the latter part of October.

If the rains are much overdue, or if they cease early in the spring, to the detriment of crops, or if the rainfall be extremely scant, the cause is attributed by many to the sins of the people. Innovations are sometimes believed to influence the amount of rainfall, and at the appearance of anything unusual, drought will at once be predicted. When the first airplane came to the city of Meshed, many were alarmed because they feared the rain would be withheld. When the present dynasty was established, by the crowning of Rida Pahlavi, the prediction

was made that there would be no rain for three years, because of the repudiation of the old ruling family, the Kajars

Since magic is employed in so many phases of the people's life, it is only natural for them to resort to it in the face of threatening drought<sup>2</sup> At times forty *sads* (*sad* is the seven teenth letter of the alphabet) are written upon a paper and hung on a tree on the side towards Mecca Likewise when there has been too much rain one hundred *kafs* (*kaf* is the twenty fourth letter) are written upon a paper, which is tied to a stick and placed where the wind will blow upon it These letters are used because they are the initial letters of two of the names of God, Kadir (Powerful) and Samad (Eternal) The numerical values (*abjad*) of these two letters are used in the same way

A prevalent custom at the time of offering sacrifice is to soak up all of the blood of the victim with masses of cotton, then to dry it and keep it until it is needed If rainfall is scant, a piece is taken out and put into water, and this bloody water is then carried to the roof and poured out so that it may run off through a drain pipe If there are seven pipes it should be poured near each one and the prospect for rain will be much surer

Praying for rain is common, and is regarded as merely obeying the command and following the example of Jonah The following ceremony is performed only in cases of extreme drought, when all other efforts have failed and when the people believe that their sins are too grave to allow God to grant the blessing It was performed in Meshed in the spring of 1917, when no rain had fallen through all the winter months, and hopes were growing fainter as day after day the sky remained cloudless Mondays and Fridays, for a period of several weeks, were appointed for performances of this rite, when the populace went outside the lower gate of the city to an uncultivated field near the *Musalla*, or "place of prayer" They took with them their babies and any animals which had young The babies were placed upon the ground together, and their mothers went away from them, the lambs, kids and calves were also taken from their mothers and put together, not far from the babies All could see their mothers and soon set up a general wail, which was interpreted as a prayer to God from the innocent and the helpless Since God had not vouchsafed an answer to the prayers of those whose hearts

were full of sin, the people said, "He will surely heed the cry of the 'pure' " Jalal al Din Rumi wrote

Clouds do not gather, because alms are withheld  
And pestilence comes because of adultery

Another method of praying for rain, and one which is employed more often than the above, is to cook in the fields, near the road and where passers by can easily reach the spot, what the people call *Ash i Khuda*, the "stew of God," which is wheat and milk boiled together. A priest reads from the Koran, or from some other religious book, and the food is then given to the poor who come out to get it. This is done in the name of Husain, and because of "the glory he has before God" rain will come.

*Black Magic* —Through enmity or jealousy people sometimes perform magic to "bind the heavens," so that rain will be withheld and ruin will come upon someone they dislike. A person with broad fields of grain, or promising fruit gardens, may be the object of the envy of one whose prospects are poor, or he may have done an injury which is to be avenged. In either case the bleached skull of an animal, preferably that of a donkey, is decorated with colours in imitation of a painted face, a written curse is fastened into its jaws and it is thrown into a waterway, or into a well. It is claimed that with this unholy make up it will bray, and God will be displeased and will therefore withhold the rain.

Another method of "binding the heavens" is to write a prayer upon the inner side of an old tin stove pipe and throw it into a well, and other similar practices are performed with filth and with dog's hair.

There are many fantastic ideas in regard to the cause of rain and how it comes down drop by drop. The angel Mika'il has control of rain, and according to Sabzewari in his "Book of Angels," when God wants rain to fall upon any particular area, he will inform Mika'il, who then gets a cloud from the sea "which is under God's throne" and commands some of his subordinate angels, whose special work is to take rain over the earth, to help him dip up the water and scatter it. In another place in the same work, he says that when Mika'il commands his angels to take rain to a particular place they go at once to get permission from the Twelfth Imam.

*The Rainbow* —The rainbow is known by several different names, it is the “bow and arrow of Rustam,” “the sword of Ali,” and “the picture of Kuh i Kaf” This last expression comes from the idea that the Kaf mountain has seven peaks, each one made of a jewel of individual colour, and when it rains these colours are reflected upon the sky The relative brightness of the colours is significant, if red seems to predominate there will be war, if green is the most prominent there will be abundance, and if yellow outshines the other colours, then there will be many deaths and probably pestilence

The particular position of the rainbow in the sky is also taken into account If it appears in the east, in the zodiacal sign of the Ram, the whole country will enjoy great blessing, if in the west, there will be famine If it is in the sign of the Bull in the east, all women will suffer, if in the west, then there will be general good fortune If it is in the sign of the Twins in the east, there will be sickness, while if in the west, there will be cholera If it is in the sign of Cancer in the east, then there will be prosperity, but if in the west, the ruler will be unfortunate If it is in the sign of the Lion in the east, the populace will still dwell in safety, while if in the west, then the country will have abundance If it is in the sign of Wheat in the east, then it will go hard with thieves, and if in the west, there will be dire pestilence If it is in the sign of the Scales in the east, there will be a great strengthening of the Mushm state, and if in the west, then good fortune will visit the people If it is in the east in the sign of the Scorpion, then grace will abound, and if it is in the west, there will be prosperity If it is in the east, in the sign of the Archer, the entire country will be free from invasion or attack, and if in the west, then general blessings will come If it is in the east, in the sign of the Goat, the common people will receive consideration, and if in the west, all the people will prosper If it is in the east, in the sign of the Water jar, great calamities will visit the country, and if in the west, there will be famine If it is in the east, in the sign of the Fish, the priests will flourish, but if in the west, women will suffer <sup>5</sup>

*Winds* —Winds also are said to influence the health of the people, for often a pain or swelling or inflammation is itself called a *bad*, or wind The direction of the wind is determined by the position of the star Canopus, and its

influence upon the people varies according to the direction from which the wind blows, the south wind is said to bring the most rain, but it tends to produce laziness, slowness of thought and many girl babies, the north wind gives strength and causes the birth of many boy babies, the east wind is considered to be the morning wind and brings calm sleep and cures sickness, and the west wind is the evening wind and is dry and warm. It forbids sleep and causes sickness.

There is a wind also which opens the buds, and another which impregnates the flowers of the trees. The "wind of the pink rose," which comes when the lovely Muhammadi rose is in bloom, is beneficial.

*Weather Predictions*—Weather predictions are certainly no less frequent among the Iranians than elsewhere. Many are to be found in their literature, and still many more in the minds of the people. If there is much thunder in *Urdi Bihisht*, the second month of spring, it is a good sign, but if there is much lightning, then there will be many deaths due to colds, the necessities of life, however, will be cheap. If there is hail, there will be many deaths and perhaps war and famine. If there are dust storms many crimes will be committed, business will be slack and kings will go to war. If there is much wind, there will be bloodshed and many great men will die, but wheat will be cheap and the winter will be cold, with much snow and rain. And so for each month the predictions are made.<sup>6</sup>

Also among the weather predictions which all the people have in mind are these: if clouds form in the sky in the direction of Mecca, there will be abundant rainfall, if a cloud takes the shape of a camel there will be cholera, and if the sparrows chirp loudly in the trees, there will certainly be rain. Also we hear that if a cat jumps upon the *kursi*, a common heating arrangement which consists of a low covered table with a brazier of coals beneath it, it is a sign of snow. When the miller's dog goes into the mill there will be rain or snow, when he comes out there will be fair weather. So also if wolves are bold and come near the villages, there will be rain.

There is a little rhyme, like our "Evening red and morning grey," which is repeated when the appearance of the sky suggests it.

If morning glows, at night it may rain  
If evening glows, when will it rain?

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The names of the ancient months of the old Persian solar year have been adopted by the Pahlavi dynasty. They are as follows: Dai, Bahman, Isfand, Farvardin, Urdi Bihisht, Khurdad, Tir, Murdad, Sharivar, Mehr, Ában, Awzar. Bahman is the second month of winter.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sabzawari's *Book of the Angels*, ch. 23, pp. 6-8. This book is divided into short chapters that are popular readings at Muhammadan religious meetings.

<sup>3</sup> *Kisaṣ al-Anbiya*, p. 117. Cf. also *Jannat al-Khulud*, p. 13, where it is said that this rite will remove any calamity whatever.

<sup>4</sup> Sabzawari *op cit*, pp. 5-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Majma al-Dawat*, p. 153. One of the safest prognostications appears to be that women will suffer.

<sup>6</sup> Najb al-Din Isfahani gives these predictions in full in his *Usul al-Mulhama*.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE HEAVENS AND HEAVENLY BODIES

ASTROLOGY and Astronomy were well known sciences among the pre Islamic Iranians, and the sun and moon were objects to be adored. When Islam became the religion of the people this worship was given up, because it is definitely forbidden in the Koran (61:37), "And among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Bend not in adoration to the sun or the moon, but bend in adoration before God who created them both if you would serve Him." But the tendency to pay special regard to the heavenly bodies has persisted, and the life of the people today is still strongly influenced by the heavens.

Every person is believed to have his individual star. If it is a bright one he is fortunate, but if a dim one, the reverse, and as long as that star lasts the person lives, and at his death the star falls. His character also is definitely shaped by the star that was rising at the hour of his birth.

All events and circumstances are closely related to the signs of the zodiac, the cardinal points, the days and nights and the lunar months. The signs of the zodiac must be consulted when planting crops. The influence upon the nation of some special occurrence depends upon the sign in which it occurs. The comets and the rainbow have significance according to the zodiacal sign in which they appear. Incompatibility between a husband and a wife may be due to the sign in which they were married, and some have been divorced in order to remarry in another sign. People will also change their names or those of their children in order that they may be renamed in a different sign. The "hidden ones"<sup>1</sup> take their positions with regard to the cardinal points and their location will be indicated in the current almanac. Dreams, the crowing of roosters, occasionally the crowing of hens, and other happenings, are ominous or otherwise according to the day of the week. Eclipses and the "cutting of the Koran" depend also upon the day of the month for their influence.

Great importance is attached to the moon. The religious year is based upon the lunar months. When the new moon appears the new month begins and that beginning is full of meaning. When the new moon is first seen every person should know just what to look at to bring him good fortune. Each month has its own specific object to be observed according to some authorities, in Muharram, the first month, a person should look upon a bright mirror, in the second month, a jewelled blade, in the third, on something green, in the fourth, on running water, in the fifth, at a white bowl, in the sixth, at a young person, in the seventh, at a worshipper in the eighth, at the Koran, in the ninth, at one's wife and children, in the tenth, on water, in the eleventh, at the palm of the hand, and in the twelfth, at a yellow garment <sup>2</sup>

Others try to look at other things, but the devout Muslim will always have a Koran at hand, for it may be looked at in lieu of anything else. It is not uncommon when the slender crescent of the moon has just appeared, to see a man stop suddenly, close his eyes, or cover them with one hand, while he reaches into his pocket for his Koran, and usually a crowd gathers about him at such a time.

A woman with a simple outlook said that at each new moon it was her custom to close her eyes and pray for every desire she could call to mind, then look upon whichever of the following were in sight, water, a green tree, or snow. If she were on a journey, or in a room where these were not to be seen she would then look at the turquoise which was set in the brass ring which she wore for protection.

A young man saw the new moon at one time when he was travelling in a truck with a number of other passengers, he took a coin from his pocket, and gazed first upon it and then at the moon, but when he realized that he had been watched by non Muslims, he turned about, and in no mild tone he told them that they had made his prayer vain. These performances should be done privately.

Some say that the first sura of the Koran should be repeated six times when the new moon is first seen, and that whoever does this will never have sore eyes. The position of the crescent is significant, if it turns to the left, infant mortality will increase and there will be many abortions, if it turns to the right there will be much general sickness, and if it is very thin there will be abundance of rain <sup>3</sup>

The day of the week upon which the first new moon of the lunar year appears decides many future events and conditions, if it appears on Saturday the winter will be severe, and there will be pestilence and sorrow, wheat will be scarce and expensive, and many animals will die. But fruit will be plentiful and toward the end of the year conditions in general will improve. If it should appear on Sunday everything will be just the opposite, and even the king will be only fairly successful. If it should come on Monday there will be an abundance of the necessities of life and marriages will increase. If it should come on Tuesday it will betoken an early and extreme winter, though otherwise economic conditions will be good, but there will be a great deal of quarrelling and considerable bloodshed. If it should come on Wednesday the priests will enjoy plenty and comfort, but among the people there will be unemployment, famine, sickness and rebellion. Thursday alone seems to be the day which betokens good in every line. For if it should appear on Friday, there will follow a severe winter and the cotton will be a failure, flocks, however, will flourish. But on any of the above days, when the evils seem to outweigh the good, some of these evils may be removed by repeating the seven salaams in the Koran <sup>4</sup>.

The phases of the moon exert influence upon people, animals and crops <sup>5</sup>. If a person should fall ill during the first half of the month he will recover more quickly than if he should fall ill during the second half, because his strength increases like the brightness of the moon from the first to the fifteenth. It is for this reason that a person who is ill should not be bled during the first half of the month, because the blood is on the increase at that time and bleeding becomes dangerous. Doctors and astrologers agree in this.

Eggs are larger and better when the moon is full, for during the first half of the month the yolks have increased in size along with the moon. Fish come to the surface and snakes come from their holes more often from the first to the fifteenth of the month. The hair of animals grows more during the early part of the month and cows give more milk. Plants and seeds that are put into the ground from the first to the fifteenth will naturally grow more rapidly and bear more fruit than if they are planted when the moon is waning. Some of the "wise ones" say that seeds that are planted

during that time will not even sprout All vegetables, especially cucumbers, squashes and melons, are larger and sweeter if they are planted before the fifteenth of the month Apples and other fruits which mature during the first half of the month, *i.e.* in the moonlight have more colour than those which mature at other times Even gems that are mined in the days of the increasing moon are brighter than those that are mined during its waning

Moonlight itself has a special influence upon human beings If a person sits much in the moonlight he becomes limp and lazy and will be susceptible to headaches and colds and if he sleeps in the moonlight he may develop fever or he may even become affected mentally

Haloed and coronas, whether around the sun or the moon, foretell the future Poets have made use of them frequently to decorate their writings But their significance depends upon the month in which they appear, if one should be seen around the moon in the early part of the first month of the year it will signify abundance, but if it should be seen during the latter part it will foretell war and flood and pestilence and if a halo about the moon should continue until the moon sets, there will soon be rain

The masses of the people of Iran are still afraid of eclipses Even among those who are giving up many of the old ideas there are those to be found who still dread an eclipse The old belief is that an eclipse indicates that God is angry with mankind on account of their sins, and that he sends a dragon at these times to swallow the sun or the moon Accordingly there is an effort to scare away this monster People go upon their housetops or into their courtyards, and beat upon brass or copper vessels to frighten this dragon with the din it is said that if the vessels are heirlooms the noise will be more effective and all this time they will be reciting prayers to the limit of their vocal abilities It is related that once during an eclipse the Prophet Muhammad read the second sura and performed a long prostration (*ruku'*) in prayer

The month in which an eclipse takes place, however, helps to determine its meaning, for example, if the sun is eclipsed in Muharram, grain will be abundant and the cost of living will be low, the ruler will triumph over his enemies, and there will be earthquakes and much sickness But if the moon is eclipsed in Muharram, some great man will die, the ruler will

be defeated in battle, crops will be poor, prices will be high and the bodies of men will itch

Great care should be taken regarding shadows at the time of an eclipse. If at this time the sun or moon should shine upon one's body and the shadow cast should not be complete or entire, then the person involved will die within the year. A woman who is five or more months pregnant should be most careful lest a shadow fall upon her abdomen and her child be given a birthmark.

Comets are generally regarded as ominous, and their position with regard to the zodiac, and the sun's location at the time, determine the exact nature, extent and severity of the evil that is to come. Iranians have retained the beliefs of the Zoroastrians that both comets and meteors are disturbers. Most of their ideas about meteors have a religious significance, they are believed to be darts that are hurled at the jinn who are eavesdropping at the heavens and are learning the heavenly secrets. The Imam Ja'far Sadik related<sup>6</sup> that Jesus forbade the jinn to go to the last four heavens, but that Muhammad forbade them to go to any of the heavens, and that the meteors are fiery darts that are hurled at the jinn to keep them out (cf Suras 15 18 and 37 6 10).

Meteors are also said to be heavenly chariots in which the Imams, and especially the "Five," are accustomed to ride. Often when a meteor is seen in Khorasan it is declared that Husain is visiting Rida, or that Rida is returning from a visit to Husain. In Kuchan, a town in Khorasan, a story is told that some forty years ago when this town was destroyed by earthquake, the Imam Rida's son, whose tomb is in Kuchan, had gone in a meteor to visit his father, whose tomb is in Meshed. It was thus, while his protecting presence was temporarily removed, that the town of Kuchan was destroyed.

The small book *Ilm i Nujum*, or the "Science of Astrology," is available for all who wish to procure it. It treats in detail of each month of each season, with reference to eclipses, haloes and coronas, comets, "the big star," rainbows, red skies, wonders, thunder, rain, hail, red dust storms, winds, sounds from the air or the ground, and earthquakes. *Jame'l-Dawat*, *Hayat al Kulub*, *Ajayib al Makhluqat*, and the *Miftah al Iman*, all these books give any other information that may be desired about the heavenly bodies and all strange happenings.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Cf chapter on Káf
- <sup>2</sup> Majlisī in the *Jannat al Khulud*
- <sup>3</sup> Isfahānī in the *Ilm ʿ Nujum*
- <sup>4</sup> Cf ch xvi on the special uses of the Koran
- <sup>5</sup> Kazwīnī *Ajayib al Makhlukāt*
- <sup>6</sup> Majlisī *Hayat al Kulub*, vol 11

## CHAPTER XIII

### NAMES AND NUMBERS

To the Iranians there is much in a name, as devout Muhammadan parents choose a name for their infant according to the sign of the zodiac, and of the star that was rising at the time of the child's birth, and no other name will harmonize with the conditions which are supposed to govern his well being. When the name has been chosen, a mulla will give the *azan*, or call to prayer, first into the left and then into the right ear of the child, then the *ikamah*, or shorter call, is given and the child is named. This name should be the accepted or proper name, but if after a time the child proves to be frail, and all medical aid has been tried to no advantage, and all prayers and talismans have failed to restore him to health, then by means of divination his name may be changed.

One puny, sickly infant had only four or five teeth when he was three years old. His mother had not weaned him, and he had grown so slowly that he had the appearance of a child not more than a year old. From the first his parents had been anxious about him, and when at last more teeth began to appear and his condition grew worse, they despaired of raising him. The mother then consulted a diviner, who told her that his name, which was Hasan, did not agree at all with the sign in which he was born and that they should give up that name and call him Assadulla, the "lion of God," and then wean him and give him regular food. The apparently miraculous happened: his teeth came through, he began to grow, and in a short time he was a normal, healthy boy. But the grateful parents failed completely to see any connection between the child's food and his improvement.

Should a child bear the name of either Muhammad or Haidar, "lion," the latter being a name by which Ali had been designated, and should he not develop normally, the mother will beg money from seven people of the same name, and with this she will buy the ear ring which is the visible sign of his

servitude to the person for whom he is named This ear ring will give him health and strength

The names of the prophets and imams are regarded as the best names, and most of the boys of Iran bear one or more of them It is said that if one has the name of an Imam, then on the Day of Judgment this Imam will make all things easy for his namesake, and anyone who bears the name of Husain will be told by Fatima that his sins are forgiven

Many a pregnant woman makes the pilgrimage to the tomb of some noted saint, so that her child may be born under that protecting shadow Almost every child bears the name of a saint, Imam or prophet, which is used in combination with the name of another one of the Imams, or with the word *ghulam*, "slave" So Muhammad Husain, Hasan Ali, Muhammad Ali, Ali Rida, Ghulam Rida, Ghulam Husain, Ghulam Ali and others are names that are many times multiplied throughout every province in the country In case the child is a girl, she may bear the name of *Kamz*, "maid servant," along with that of one of the saints, e g, *Kamz i Rida*, and her nose will be pierced for the ring which is to be the sign of her servitude to that saint But there are some people who will not call their children by these names, though they may have been given to them, because they do not want the name of their prophet or that of any of their saints to be spoken in anger or with a curse, so in everyday usage they call the child "slave" or designate it by some animal's name

Exceptionally beautiful children are often named *Masha Allah*, or at any rate they are called that, so as to protect them from the spell of the evil eye

The night on which a baby is named he must not be put upon the floor, and there is a special food, that consists of onions, eggs and grease, which should be prepared and eaten at that time

Within the present decade the people of Iran have taken surnames, many of which are taken from their home towns, such as Abu'l Ghasim *Kashani*, or Amir Ali *Birjandi* Others have taken the names of their trades, as Husain *Buranda* "sawyer," and Rida *Bannar*, mason" Still others have made further use of the names of the Imams, because of the protection they think these saints will give them, as in the names Hasan *Ridar* and Ali *Husaini*



The names of God, of which there are ninety-nine that are "known," are regarded as having special magic power. Frequently one of these names of God will be written on a slip of paper to be kept on the person for good luck, or the initials of one or more of the names of God may be arranged in conventional form and used as a protective talisman.

### NUMBERS

Numbers are often employed in the conversations of Iranians for the sake of emphasis. When they describe an aggregation of many separate units, *hazar ta*, "one thousand units," is frequently used. The limit of exaggeration in ordinary conversation seems to be *hazar hazar ta*, "a thousand thousand," with strong emphasis upon the first *hazar*. "Seventy thousand" is a favourite number when they are trying to express what is innumerable, such as the stars, or the angels which hover over a sacred place. A "thousand" is much used when there is any considerable number of anything to be mentioned, as *hazar masjid*, "a thousand mosques." Much stress is put upon the repetition of a name or of an attribute of God, and if the worshipper repeats one of these a thousand times he earns much merit. The *tasbeih*, or rosary, which is so frequently seen in the hands of the men of Iran, contains one hundred beads, which are divided into three sections, for ease in counting these repetitions. And if anyone reads Sura 18 37 "a thousand times," he will be able to make the pilgrimage to Mecca.

"Forty" is also widely used in description, more as a convenient round number than with the idea of making an accurate statement—e.g., a large building may be said to have "forty" pillars in its portico, when perhaps there are twenty-four or even sixty, a region where springs burst from the ground every few yards may be called the place of "forty springs", approximate distances are described as forty *zars* (meters), Moses is said to have been in the mountain with God for "thirty" nights, but God added ten to make the number "forty." Moreover there is the magic of the "bowl of forty keys," and "forty days after" the death of a person is a day set apart, because the spirit of the departed one returns on that day.

But seven seems to be the number of numbers. It is a perfect number, since there are seven days of the week, seven

planets, seven heavens, seven hills and seven climes The 'seventh day after' death is also significant, for on that day the departed spirit visits his earthly home

In much of the magic that is done by women seven plays an important part the baby's bracelet must have seven kinds of beads (*cf* chapter on "Birth"), the magic cord which is especially woven for certain ceremonies, must consist of seven different colours of thread seven knots must be tied in the string which is used in exorcising evil particular objects must be blown upon seven times, to give them the power to cause either evil or good, seven pieces of cloth are used in other magical ceremonies, seven prayers are written by the prayer writer on as many slips of paper or pieces of cloth, seven spices are prepared for the marriage feast seven objects, the names of which begin with the same letter, are necessary for the New Year feast, seven food stuffs, which are ingredients of special foods with magical value, must have the same initial letter and whole suras or particular verses of the Koran must be read seven times and perhaps on seven different days, to obtain the greatest value

A woman may have a keen desire for some event to happen She will disguise herself and visit seven houses and beg some food stuff with which to prepare the special food the eating of which will bring her desire to pass Likewise the shoulder blade of a sacrificed sheep will be put under a new born baby's pillow and allowed to remain seven days, so that when he grows up he will have the gift of prophecy Some leave it there for forty days, so as to be entirely sure

Next to seven in magical power is the number seventy If one reads the *kursi*, or "throne," verse (Sura 18 37) seventy times, then all his needs will be met When he has an important matter of business which he wants settled soon, he will go to the desert alone and draw a circle upon the ground and read this verse seventy times and it surely will be accomplished For most of the directions for obtaining merit from reading the Koran, or portions thereof, lay great stress upon reading them seventy times

Three, twenty two and forty one are other effective numbers of times for performing magical rites Often several of these numbers are combined, as in the following instance On the twenty second day of the New Year a person should read Suras 1, 112, 113 and 114, and repeat the *kursi* verse seventy

times, then blow his breath upon a bowl of water, and then for seven mornings drink of that water, and God will cure any form of illness he may have

Twelve is a perfect number because there are twelve signs of the zodiac, twelve months and Twelve Imams, but thirteen is regarded as unlucky, and in counting there are those who will usually say, "twelve, twelve and one fourteen"

The science of numbers, or *abjad*, as it is called from the four letters that compose the name, *i e a b j a d*, receives much attention in all forms of magic. This science gives each letter of the alphabet a numerical value. Dervishes, and theologians who perform divination, know these values and work out amulets, talismans and prayers in accordance with them. Whether the dervish uses the name of the suppliant, or of his mother, or the names of the four great angels, or a name of God or of a prophet, in any case he will decide from the values of the letters which make up the name as to just how many prayers he is to write.

The word *kursi* with the letters *ku r s i* (20, 200, 60 and 10), has a total numerical value of 290, so the most powerful and effective prayer is to repeat this *kursi* verse two hundred and ninety times.

One of the best known uses of the *abjad*, or science of numbers, is that with the name *Buduh*, *bu d u h* (2, 4, 6 and 8). When these four numbers are put upon an addressed envelope the letter will reach its destination without fail because the Imams say that *Buduh* is an angel who will see that it is delivered. He is said to be one of the great angels and there are fantastic stories that connect him with the magic square, in which the numerical values of the letters of his name are used. His 'sign' is the five pointed star.

## CHAPTER XIV

### OATHS CURSES AND BLESSINGS

THE majority of the children in Iran grow up accustomed to hearing oaths uttered by their elders, and long before they have reached maturity they have themselves formed the oath habit. An example of the widespread use of oaths among the common people is that of a girl who was heard to give the following answer when her neighbour asked about her mother,

By God I don't know where she is. By Abu'l Fadl I was just now in the house and she isn't there, she may have gone to the shop, *wa'llah*! (and God be the witness)." The expression *ba Khuda* (by God) was originally used with the idea of strengthening a statement, but today the name of God is so frequently and so lightly spoken that the speaker scarcely realizes it has been uttered. A woman enters a room and is asked to take a seat, as she sits she says "*Ay Khuda* (O God)," and more often it seems to be an automatic part of her downsitting and uprising rather than any sort of a prayer. In the same way *ba Abu'l Fadl* often slips into her conversation without her realizing she has said it.

The oath in the name of Abu'l Fadl is made most binding when it is taken in a mosque and in the formal manner. The swearer must first go to the bath, when later he enters the mosque he takes seven steps towards Mecca, for Abu'l Fadl's grave is in Mesopotamia, and so from Iran it also lies in the direction of Mecca, and these steps are toward Abu'l Fadl. The swearer then sticks a knife into the ground and swears in Abu'l Fadl's name, and pulls out the knife and says, "As I pull out this knife may Abu'l Fadl pull out my beard if I do not keep this oath." The beard has always been regarded as the symbol of manhood and the mention of it here adds weight to the oath.

The ejaculation *wa'llah* seems to be used more to decorate the speech than to strengthen it, and it usually precedes or closes a statement. The exclamation *ya'Allah* has been customarily used when a man entered a courtyard, it was

a warning to women to cover their faces, or to hide themselves so as not to be seen by a strange man. Now that the veil has been removed there may be no further use for the expression under those circumstances. It is used also at times by men when they are lifting heavy loads. *Ya Ali* is more often used when they are seeking divine assistance, and men have been heard to say that the words have really lightened the burden. But muleteers, whose overloaded donkeys have lain down or fallen with their loads, have been seen to beat their animals to the accompaniment of "In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate!"

An oath in the name of Abbas is especially sacred. It is claimed that if one swears falsely in this name he will be struck dead, even Sunnites are said to fear this oath. A story is related that a slave once swore to a lie in the tomb of Abbas, his head was immediately severed from his body and flew to the ceiling, and there it remains to this day! Several of those who have made the pilgrimage to the tomb of Abbas have been questioned about this story, and while they acknowledge that they did not see the head, yet they affirm that it must be there because the story is true. Others have said that they could see a black object on the ceiling but could not distinguish it clearly. This is a shrine that pilgrims enter with fear, a place where they do not linger.

In ordinary conversation people sometimes say "By the Koran" to verify their words. Oaths on the Koran may be taken before a priest, for an appointed fee. It is claimed, however, that such oaths are rare, because the religious authorities advise against swearing on the holy book on account of its extreme sacredness.

Oaths that are taken in the name or spirit of an Imam or prophet are regarded seriously, though the latter are considered less binding. Such an oath is spoken anywhere, but when a person is near the tomb of an Imam or a prophet, the oath is made more impressive by placing the hand on the tomb when it is taken. Women swear frequently by Fatima and Zainab, the mother and sister of the martyr Husain. Many are the oaths in the names of Husain, Ali Akbar his son, and others of the martyrs of Kerbala. Sometimes an oath is taken in the names of the "Five." An oath "by the blood" of one of these martyrs is exceedingly sacred, and great reverence is given to "by the severed head of

Husain " and to " by the bloody beard of Husain," but " by the split head of Ali " is said with equal regard

There is also great value to oaths that are taken by the hair or eye or tooth or beard of the Prophet, and there are shrines which are said to contain some of these relics from his person. At Jozagan, a village in Khorasan, and near the border of Afghanistan, there is a Sunnite shrine and place of pilgrimage, and its inhabitants claim that it contains one hair from Muhammad's beard, and that this hair is kept encased in a set of sixty boxes. The Shiites of a nearby village have coveted this treasure and have repeatedly bargained with the Sunnites for its purchase. They are said to have offered as much as 200,000 rials for it, but the Sunnites will not part with it, for they claim that because of this holy hair, neither famine nor pestilence has ever come to their village.

Oaths that are taken by the dust, the spirit, the grave or the corpse of a deceased parent or other near relative are treated with great reverence.

Swearing by one's own life is said to be an exceedingly solemn oath, but it is used so much in the course of petty arguments that in reality it has come to have little significance. A pedlar who was selling soap had the merchandise weighed out and held his scales in his hand, but when the weight was challenged he swore by his neck that it was correct. When a bolt that had been fastened to one of the plates was noticed by the buyer, he swore vehemently on his life, declaring, "Separate my head from my body, I did not know it was there."

To swear by the life of another especially of one's child, is very common, and friends swear by one another's hair, head, life and death. "By the death of my child" is most binding between friends, for it is said to be as sacred as an oath in the name of God, or of an Imam or a Prophet, or of Abu'l Fadl or Fatima or Zainab, and when an oath in the name of any of these is broken the penalty is certain death.

Particular tribes swear by the heads of their chiefs. Their devotion to their leader is said to be such that they regard no god or prophet but him. The Kurds along the Turkestan border swear most frequently by the heads of their sons, a hand is placed upon the child's head while the parent says 'On the life of my son,' or "May this, my son, soon die if I do not speak the truth." "By the milk of my mother" is a solemn oath among many tribespeople in Khorasan.

Among the nomads it is the custom to swear by the horn of a goat, which means by one's possessions

The oath "on the oven" is considered holy, and when this oath is taken they say, "We swear on the oven of Solomon," because tradition tells them that Solomon made the first oven and gave it as his gift to mankind. To say that one's "oven is warm" is to infer that the owner of the oven has plenty and is therefore in God's favour

"By my spiritual strength" is used by one who is accused of having failed to fulfil an obligation. He prepares two piles of earth seven steps apart, and as he faces Mecca he kicks one pile and says 'I take oath that I am not indebted', he then goes to the second pile and repeats the act. This oath is taken in all seriousness, for it is believed that if one then swears falsely surely destruction will come to him. It is related that once a man did swear this oath falsely, and immediately his abdomen burst open and his entrails rolled out upon the ground. Except in cases where the punishment for breaking a solemn oath is thus immediate, a sacrifice may be offered to free the swearer from the evil consequences of his broken word

Formerly when men plotted a conspiracy against a ruler or a tribal chief they swore to one another "on their moustaches," which meant on their manly strength, their pride, and the oath was held to be binding unto death. It was considered to be stronger than an oath taken in the names of all the Imams, or by the beard, eye or tooth of the Prophet, or by the severed head of Husain or by the split head of Ali. At the present time however, it has lost most of its importance and is even made a subject of jesting

Oaths are made in the names of various objects and places. Drinking fountains are said to belong to Abu'l Fadl, so women go to them and make vows when they are eager to have children. Such a woman says, "I swear by this fountain, if I am given a son I will fulfil my vow." "By the forty lamps of the Imam Rida" is a significant oath, for the forty lamps refers to a huge candelabra in the shrine of the Imam Rida. Oaths are made also in the name of the room in which one's child was born. And sacred stones, such as the famous black stone of Mecca, or the one bearing the foot print of the Imam Rida at Kadamgah, and many others of less importance, are often mentioned in oaths

There are those who swear by trees, but it is forbidden to swear by the fig and the olive, for God himself swore by them (95 1) There are other prohibitions against swearing by the sun and moon (91 1 2), by the stars (85 1) and by Mount Sinai (95 2) God swore by these and humans must not take oath in the names of those things by which God has sworn

### CURSES

Cursing is a part of the Shi'ite religious ceremony at the close of the stated prayers, curses are uttered against Umar, Uthman, Abu Bakr, A'isha, Hafsa and Hind, those who killed the Imam Husain are systematically cursed and in so doing the curser adds to his store of merit, in the ritual for making the circumambulation of the tomb of the Imam Rida in Meshed, the curse to be pronounced upon Harun al Rashid is provided for the pilgrim in the book of prayers, ' God kill him who killed thee and God curse those who oppressed thee by their hands and tongues " It is incumbent upon the Muslims to curse all unbelievers who are usually spoken of as infidels, for in the Koran it is written (33 64), ' Verily God hath cursed the infidels and hath got ready for them the flame " And in the same sura, verse 27, may be read " Verily they who affront God and His Apostle, the curse of God is on them in this world and in the world to come " Also we read (2 156), " Verily they who are infidels and die infidels—these ' upon them shall be the malison of God and of angels and of all men " Christians, Jews and evil doers are also cursed (5 65 69 and 4 50), " O ye to whom the Scriptures have been given ' Believe in what we have sent down confirmatory of the Scripture which is in your hands, ere we efface your features and twist your heads round backward, or curse you as we cursed the Sabbath breakers and the command of God was carried into effect " Liars are explicitly cursed (3 78 79), and Satan and the hypocrites also get their share of malediction

Special animals are cursed, and all those which should be killed should also be cursed Tradition tells of two such animals and gives the reason why this should be done The mouse stole the wick of the Prophet's candle and carried it underneath the place where he was engaged in prayer, various articles caught fire and Muhammad was exceedingly



angry Another time when Muhammad was engaged in prayer a scorpion stung him, he killed it, and when his prayer was finished he pronounced this curse upon it, "May the curse of God be upon you because you do not discriminate between good and bad people" The savage dog, likewise, should be cursed and killed

When people quarrel it is not uncommon to hear them curse each the other's father, mother or near relative

The following story, which practically every Shi'ite knows, explains why Umar, Uthman and Abu Bakr are so frequently cursed At one time these three accused Ali of not distributing all that had been collected for the needy The story is that Ali took Umar upon his horse, Duldul, and flew through the air until they arrived at Jabal Ga and Jabal Sa on the other side of Kaf There Umar saw many strange things, one sight which impressed him greatly was that of a man who was planting seeds Umar was amazed and looked more closely, for the seeds grew immediately and almost at the same time he saw others reaping the harvest Then he saw that the sower was muttering something as he planted, and when he listened he heard that he was cursing Umar When they plant seeds there are many people in Iran who may still be heard to say, "Cursed be Umar and Uthman and Abu Bakr," for when this is done seven times the seeds will grow quickly

Another similar performance is that of gathering 1197 sheep droppings One by one these are dropped upon a brazier of live coals, and with each one the curse given above is spoken, which is believed to bring some special help or blessing from God

On the ninth day of the month of Shavaal, which is Umar's birthday, he is publicly burned in effigy and cursed An old garment is stuffed with straw or grass, and explosives are inserted here and there throughout When the image is set on fire there is much merriment and each explosion is accompanied by shrieks of delight

Some curses are in the name of God, for the one who utters such a curse strikes his chest with his hand and says, "May God kill you," or "May sudden death strike you" Such curses are extremely vindictive and people fear them "May God ruin your house," or "kill your animals," or "May drought take your crops," are only a degree less terrible When a beggar in the street is denied alms and gets angry

he is very apt to curse with some such expression as "May God cut off your bread," or "May you be struck blind," or "palsied" or "struck by an arrow" These condemnations also are feared and alms are often given to avert such curses "May your life be full of sorrow and bitterness" is often said in spite, or in a spirit of hatred "May you die if what I have said is not so" is almost the same as an oath, but in this usage the curse is the motive

One of the most dreaded of curses is, "May the consequences of this be to me like the eating of swine's flesh, if I have not told the truth, and the same to you if I have" This is considered to be so revolting that the one who says it is regarded as having undoubtedly spoken the truth

"May the washer of dead bodies get you" is used in dealing with disobedient children, and many regard it also as a curse The body washers form the lowest social order in Iran A mother says to her wayward child, "My milk is forbidden to you," and this is by way of cursing him, as when she says, "He is no child of mine"

### BLESSINGS

The Iranian is just as ready with a blessing upon the doer of a good deed as he is with a curse upon one who has wronged him "May God give you life" is frequently heard, and sometimes when gratitude seems to overflow they ask for you also "100 years on earth and 1,000 in heaven" "May God give you many children" and "For the sake of Husain, may you have a son" are both used when calling down the choicest of blessings "May the water carrier of Kosair (*i.e.* Ali) change all ills to blessings for you" is spoken from a devout heart Others which are heard many times every day are, 'May your hand never pain you,' 'May your shadow never grow less,' and 'I am one who prays for you'

In speaking of one's child, "May God keep it" is almost habitually spoken And when one person sees another carrying a heavy load or doing a difficult task or making something which pleases, he says to him, "God give you strength" "May you become old" is used much as "May God give you life" "May you have fellowship with Ali and Fatima on the Day of Judgment" shows great consideration, and 'May Ali and Fatima meet you the first night in the grave' comes from the heart of a well wisher

## CHAPTER XV

### THE CALENDAR

THE Muslim calendar is based on the lunar months. Each year a given date falls eleven days earlier than in the year preceding, so that in the course of thirty three years it has made the revolution of the entire year. Likewise, a birthday which this year falls upon a beautiful day in summer, will, sixteen years hence, fall upon a cold day in mid winter. Most of the days which figure in the practice of magic have to do with this unchanging lunar year, and with few exceptions they are days which are connected with a religious belief, or with some particular event in Muslim history.

One of the most important of these exceptions in Iran is the New Year's day, which falls at the vernal equinox. According to this calendar the twenty four hour day begins at sunset instead of at midnight, as in western countries, so the night preceding the last Wednesday of the year is observed as a special feast, which is spoken of as the feast of 'the last Wednesday night'. It is the custom on this night to have ready a small new earthen water pot and to put into it a piece of black money, a piece of charcoal, some seeds of the wild rue and a piece of rock salt, and at sunset to carry it to the top of the wall, or onto the roof which overlooks the street, and to throw it down below. With it goes all grief and misfortune which the coming year might bring. Some fill the pot with water and then throw it out, so that any evil that might be destined to come during the new year will disappear just as the water gradually soaks into the ground.

Dried thorn is placed in several piles, a few feet apart, and is set on fire. Then for joy that the winter is over the members of the household, and the friends and neighbours who may be present, jump over the piles of burning thorn as they say, "My yellow colour I give to you and your red colour you give to me!" This means an exchange of paleness for ruddiness, of uncomeliness for beauty, and of weakness for strength.

One of the very essential customs is to don new clothes at

this season But they must be put on before the New Year actually begins, and the exact day and hour to do this must be carefully determined For this purpose there are authoritative books available, the current almanac and such books as the *Mifta al Jman*, "The Key to Paradise" Often they will seek the opinions of specialists who are versed in the "science of hours"

The night before the New Year everyone should eat of an omelet that is made with greens, and also of a *pilau* (the national dish of rice with meat) which has greens in it, with the hope that during the year they may not be without money, work, food or clothing

On the New Year's Day itself many special things are done Seven articles must be gathered together and placed upon a cloth that is spread upon the floor before a mirror and candles The names of these articles must begin with the letter *sin* (s), as *sib*, "apple", *sir*, "garlic", *sumak*, "sumac", *singid*, "jujube", *samanu* "a sweet meat", *sirka* "vinegar", and *sabzi*, "greens" Along with these are placed dishes that contain uncooked rice, milk, pilau, dried fish, cheese, and eggs To complete the list there is a live fish in a bowl of water, upon which a leaf is floating, and also a glass containing a sow bug which is for good luck A person sits before a mirror with a Koran in his lap and facing Mecca and when the gun is fired to announce the "change of the year," he reads the entire sura "Ya Sin," eats a sweet of some kind and says, "May it be blessed!" And if one holds a sow bug in the hand at the time the gun is fired, it is said to change to gold, for the hand will have money in it during the year By some the sow bug is considered sacred, for it is called God's Cow, and at times God's Donkey Moreover, there should be written out and ready at hand, so as to be put into a bowl of water just as the gun is fired, the "seven salaams" of the Koran,<sup>1</sup> and when the sound of the gun is heard, they pray, "O thou who art the changer of every condition, change our condition to good"

The first thing that should be eaten after the New Year has been announced is an egg, for it insures good fortune, and the first person to enter the house will bring good or bad fortune, according as he is himself good or bad Also the colour of the first thing which is brought into the house will determine the spirit that will prevail for the ensuing year, if it is white, then happiness will predominate, but if it is

black there will be sorrow and trouble and strife If there is an oven in the house it should be hot, and everyone's hunger should be satisfied at the sound of the gun, or there will be hunger and want throughout the year Each individual should be careful of the place where he may be exactly at the "change of the year," for it is symbolical of the places where he will spend most of his time during the succeeding twelve months

It is believed that if a boiled egg is put upon a mirror it will move a little just at the instant of the year's change, and that if an orange is allowed to float in a bowl of water it will turn over at just that moment This, they say, is because of the jolt the earth receives when the Bull, who stands on the Fish in the sea and holds the earth on his horns, tosses the earth from one horn to the other for the new year

Festive practices do not end with the days which immediately precede and follow the New Year's day On the following Thursday night every person should eat pilau, to be assured that he will be fortunate enough throughout the year to have this favourite food at least once a week Also the "thirteenth day after" is a very general holiday Here tofore it was a day for the men to take walks or drives outside the city, while the women would get out of their houses to visit for a day's picnic in the gardens or green fields within the city walls Now the women also may go outside, though in some places they are still reluctant to avail themselves of this greater freedom It is said that if possible a person should leave the city by one gate and return by another, so that the evil which has accompanied him, and that waits for him just outside the gate, will not have a chance to return with him When out in the fields on this day, a person should sit in the wheat and pass his hand over the green surface and say, "O fresh and unnoticed wheat, may thy freshness be mine and my yellow be thine" And it is better not to return home until after sunset, so that any pain or sickness may remain outside

In the cities especially, plates of sprouted wheat or other plants that have decorated the table or the floor during the New Year's season, are scrupulously thrown out over the wall into the street on the "thirteenth" This is with the belief that sins are thrown out with them

But it is observed that New Year's celebrations vary greatly

with the locality Many country people, especially the nomads, consider that the night preceding the New Year is bad, and that night they will go to some place other than their homes to sleep The following day, the men and women will go to the house of their head man to play the tambourines, clap their hands, and dance The men and women both dance, but not together, and their dancing is strenuous, for it is done to drive out all evil, so that they may live in peace and harmony among themselves

In the calendar for the year there are many important days The first month, Muharram, has several the first is a good day in general, especially for beginning undertakings, the third is the day on which Joseph was drawn out of the well the fifth, Moses went to Sinai, the ninth, Jonah came out of the fish's belly, and the tenth, the Imam Husain was martyred On this day no one should adorn himself, but instead he should go to the grave of the martyr and there spend the night

But according to Kazwini,<sup>3</sup> many other important events took place on this tenth day

Adam repented

Abraham, Moses and Jesus were born

Abraham was thrown into the fire which became cold <sup>4</sup>

Jacob's eyes, which had become blind with weeping  
for Joseph, became clear

Joseph was freed from prison

Solomon's kingdom was again honoured, after his magic  
ring had been found

The city of Nineveh was saved by the prayer of Jonah

Job was cured of his ills

John the Baptist was born

Zachariah's prayer for a son was answered

Moses saw the burning bush

Moses and the Israelites left Pharaoh on the tenth, and  
the Jews of Medina observed that day Muhammad  
declared that he had more reason than they had to  
regard the day, since it was to be the day of  
Husain's martyrdom

Safar is the second month, and the name is said to be a modification of the Persian word *sifr*, meaning cipher In so much as war was forbidden during the three preceding months, in Safar they were only too glad to get out and fight, so the

saying was that because all the men had gone to war the houses were "empty," like a cipher. Because so many men were killed in battle, or died during the month, it came to be regarded as a month of mourning. Two days in Safar have special significance, the twentieth, because on this day the head of the martyred Husain was sent to Damascus, and the twenty eighth, which is observed in memory of Hasan. It is customary on this latter day for women to cook halva and give it to those who come to get it for making vows.

But there are many days of Safar that are regarded as days of bad fortune. It is said that of all the plagues that are sent by God, nine tenths of them come in Safar, and nine-tenths of those fall on the last Wednesday of the month, which was the day when Hasan and Husain were lost in the desert.<sup>b</sup> During the search for them, Fatima, their mother, vowed that if they were found uninjured, she would cook a potful of gruel, made of rice, milk, grease, sugar and cardamom seed, and that she would give it to any who would come. This she did out on the desert by the roadside, so it has become a custom for women who have deep and earnest desires to do this just as Fatima had done, though now they do it at home, in a dark room. No man, nor boy, nor pregnant woman (for her unborn child may be a boy) should look upon it or they would become blind, and no person who was not ceremonially clean should look at it, or its power would be taken from it. Those who eat of it, however, will get whatever desire they may express, but at the time of the fulfilment of their wish they must pay a money reward to their hostess.

Another gruel that is cooked on this day is called the *ash i Abu Darda*, the gruel of Abu Darda, who was one of the "companions" of the Prophet. He had become very ill on the last Wednesday of Safar, and his wife cooked a gruel which cured him, and it has become a custom, especially when there is illness in the house, to cook gruel on this day. The one who is to prepare it disguises herself and goes to seven houses, taps lightly on the door with a spoon, and when the door is opened she asks for a spoonful of flour, rice, salt or other necessary ingredient. When the gruel is prepared a dough image is cooked in it. This is removed and thrown into a stream, to be carried away, taking the sickness with it. Sometimes two of these images are cooked and taken into the street, about the time people return to their homes in the

evening The custom is so well known that someone is sure to pick up one of the images and carry it away, because he knows he is performing a kind deed, for the sickness goes along with the image and the sick one will recover If the malady is epilepsy or insanity, it is believed that the jinn are responsible and a more elaborate performance is required A priest is asked to come to the house and make the image he writes the name of the stricken one upon it and puts a written prayer into the mouth, or presses it into the stomach, then wraps it in a cloth, as a corpse is wrapped and takes it out and buries it When he has done this he must not turn and look back as he leaves the place, or the patient will not recover They say this service requires a great deal of money !

In the third month, *Rabi' al Awwal*, there is one significant day, the *ninth*, the day on which Umar, the second Caliph is said to have died The Shi'ites celebrate this day with rejoicing, and at night they burn Umar in effigy and have a general jollification

Sha ban, the eighth month, has one day which is regarded by most Shi'ites as exceptionally significant That is the fifteenth the birthday of the Mahdi or the hidden Imam <sup>6</sup> The preceding night is called the *shab i barat*, the "night of assignment" It is said that on this night there descend to earth those tablets that contain the names of those whose souls the Angel of Death will take during the year <sup>7</sup> and that contain also pardons from God to many of the living and the dead, to free them from the fires of Hell Some say that God gathers all the events of the coming year that night and shows them to the Mahdi In order to make a good showing a great deal of piety is shown on this day and the three preceding days, and all this merit goes to the dead Then spirits of the dead are free on the nights of the fourteenth and the fifteenth, and because of the good works that they see are being done for them, they intercede for the living Many people spend these three days and nights at the graves of their dead They keep lamps burning upon the graves, they bake a special sort of cake which they give to the poor, and they prepare bread, *halva* and *pilau* to give to those who ask for it In each of these acts there is great merit But some of those who have learning spend most of this time at the graves in reading the Koran and those who are themselves illiterate may hire others to read for them There is a talisman called the talisman of



the Night of Barát, which must be cut on one of these three days

The ninth month, Ramadan, which is the month of fasting, and is called the Blessed Month, has a considerable number of outstanding days. On the night of the fourteenth, or the full moon, whoever goes out of the house must carefully consider his shadow, for if he is able to see the shadow of his whole body, then all is well, but if he sees a headless body or one minus a leg or an arm, he knows for a certainty that he is very near death, or that he is about to become the victim of some accident which will leave him maimed for life. And there is one night in this month, but no one really knows which night it is, that is called the *shab i kadr*, the "night of power"<sup>8</sup>. Rodwell remarks that it is one of the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan.<sup>9</sup> This night is better than a thousand months. Angels come down to earth in such numbers that there is no room for a needle between them, and there is peace and quiet till morning, and whatever a person wants from God he will get, and God will arrange for his every need for the whole year. Yet there is so little that is definitely known about this night that some even say that it comes within the days of *barat* in the month of Sha'ban, but most people claim that it falls at some time between the nineteenth and the twenty third of Ramadan.<sup>10</sup> The twenty seventh of Ramadan is celebrated also. Seven women will beg money to buy cloth. Between the stated noon and evening prayers of the same day, they take a sewing machine to the shrine or some other place of pilgrimage, and there they sew rapidly to finish a garment within the restricted limits of time. This garment is kept to be put on only when the wearer has some deep desire that she wishes to have fulfilled. There have been times when the courtyard of the mosque in Meshed has been crowded with women sewing feverishly to finish their garment in time. Also on this day halva is cooked in fulfilment of vows. For example, if a woman has strongly desired to get a husband, she will vow that if her wish is granted she will prepare halva every year on this day and give it to anyone who comes to ask a portion. It is said that near one of the gates of the city of Isfahan, the one which they claim that Ali touched, as many as three thousand women would gather at this time some years ago to prepare or to beg halvá. In Teheran also this used to be done near the "pearl cannon."

There are days which are considered wholly bad. Some of the learned men have said that there are seven of these days in each month. Ali said that there are two, and the Imam Ja'far Sadik said that there is only one such day in each month. On these days nothing turns out well unless it be accompanied by a sacrifice or by the giving of alms. Whatever work is started then will never be finished, a child born then will not live, a journey begun then will not be successful and a tree planted then will not bear fruit. So also the first day of any month is commonly regarded as inauspicious for many things. One should not have his hair cut on that day, nor should he go to the bath, for if he does so he will not be well all the rest of the month. If the first day should fall on Wednesday, however, he will be ill only until the next Wednesday !

The different days of the week have their recognized values.<sup>11</sup> Friday is not a good day on which to start a journey, as it is sure to be unfortunate. If a house guest remains over Friday night he must also stay over Saturday night, or his going will remove all good fortune from the family. However, Ali said that it was a good day to take a wife to her husband's house, and it is a good day on which to deliver sermons. Moreover Adam was born on Friday, he and Eve were married on Friday, but they were also put out of the Garden of Eden on Friday. And the current almanac says that Abraham built the Kaaba on Friday in the year 3429 B.C., which Friday was at that time the eighth of February.<sup>12</sup>

*Saturday* is a day of evil and deceit as it was on Saturday that the Kuraish deceived Muhammad. But it is a good day for hunting and fishing. Yet fruit should not be gathered on Saturday, for if so the tree will not bear fruit the coming year.

*Sunday* is a good day to begin building a house, because it was on Sunday that God began the creation of the world. It is also a good day for sowing. It is claimed that Jesus said that, along with Friday, Sunday was a good day on which to begin any work, and the reason that Christians observed Sunday is that Jesus said that they did not want their holy day to precede that of the Jews, so they did not choose Friday.

*Monday* is the best day for fasting and other holy works. Muhammad was born on Monday and his first vision came to

him on Monday He fled from Mecca to Medina on Monday and died on Monday Monday is a good day to go to see a doctor, is a good day for trade, also, and Ali said that it was a good day on which to start a journey

*Tuesday* is the most favourable day for "taking blood" It was on Tuesday that Cain killed his brother Abel But it is not considered to be good to take a new baby for its first bath on Tuesday, and if one goes to a house on Tuesday and asks the health of one who is not well, should the person die within the next forty days, his death is due to that inquiry

*Wednesday* is also generally regarded as bad, yet Ali said it was a good day for taking medicine, if medicine is necessary Jonah was swallowed by the whale on Wednesday, but the gourd grew up for him on Wednesday Joseph was born on Wednesday, and God sent a message of prophecy to Abraham on Wednesday

*Thursday* is a bad day for "blood taking," for should the person who is bled contract fever afterwards, he will not recover But it is a good day for visiting, and for beginning or ending a journey, it is also a good day on which to make requests from kings, and a baby that is born on Thursday or Friday is weighed, and sweets or sugar equal to his weight will be given away On Thursday afternoon people visit graveyards, and frequently they take food to give to the poor The spirits of the dead are supposed to be free on Thursday afternoons and until Friday noon when they come to their relatives' houses, sit on the roofs, and beg them to perform deeds of mercy to keep them from being tortured

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf Sura 37 following verses to Noah 77 to Abraham 109 to Moses and Adam 120 and to Ilias 130 See also 36 58 97 5 and 80 73

<sup>2</sup> The names of the lunar months that make up the Muhammadan calendar are

1 Muharram	7 Rajab
2 Šafar	8 Sha ban
3 Rabí al Awwal	9 Ramadan
4 Rabí al Ákhir	10 Shawwal
5 Jumada al Ula	11 Dhu al Ka dah
6 Jumada al Ukhra	12 Dhu al Hijjah

<sup>3</sup> Kazwiní *Ajazyb al Makhluát* p 108

<sup>4</sup> Sura 21 68 69

- <sup>5</sup> See chapter on Angels note 8
- <sup>6</sup> Donaldson The Shi'ite Religion p 226
- <sup>7</sup> Kazwini *Ajayib al Makhlukat*, p 91
- <sup>8</sup> Sura 97 2
- <sup>9</sup> Rodwell's Koran p 37 note 2
- <sup>10</sup> Kazwini, *Ajayib al Makhlukat* p 107
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid* pp 103 106
- <sup>12</sup> Current almanac for year 1313 A H (Solar calendar)

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE KORAN

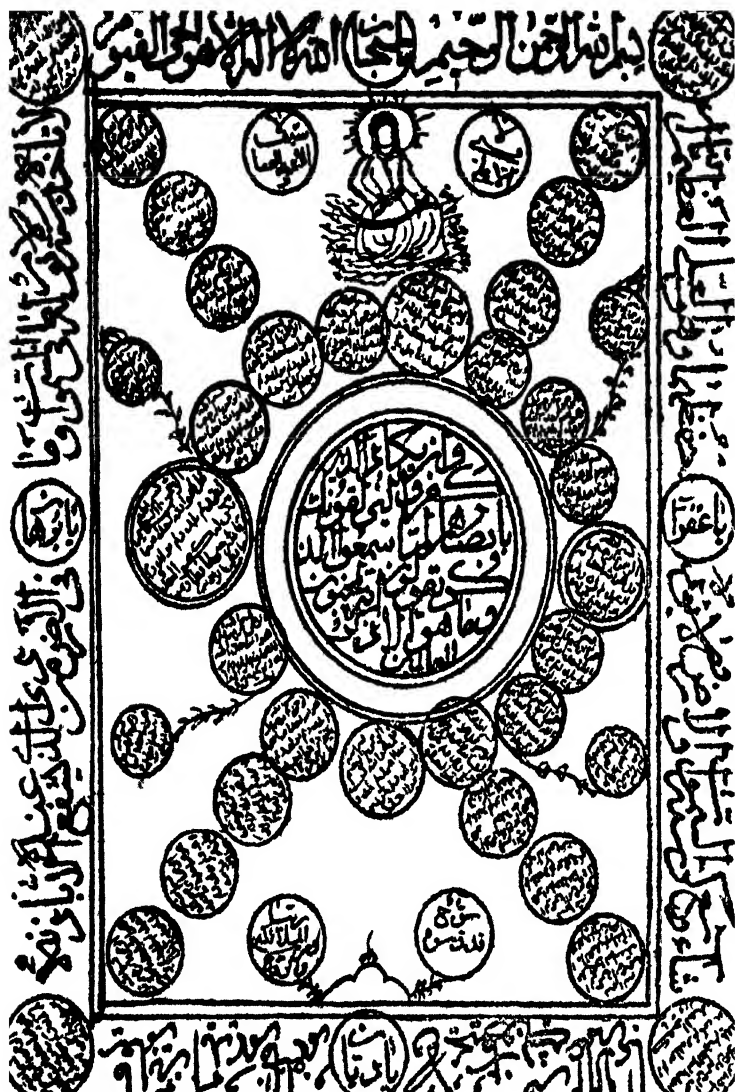
this is the honourable Koran written in the Preserved Book let none touch it but the purified it is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds —Sura 56 76 79

THE Shi'ite Muhammadans treat their holy book with great respect, it is the custom to kiss it when taking it into the hands, and they believe that the original came down from heaven and that it is the word of God <sup>1</sup>. A person should not touch this book until he has performed his ceremonial ablutions, some will not touch it then unless they have previously been to the bath. It should not be taken into any unclean place, and it is forbidden to take it where there is wine or gambling. It is said to have 70,000 hidden meanings, which are known only to the Mahdi, or hidden Imam and it is claimed that it cannot be translated and that only God and the Imams know how to interpret it.

Like the sacred books of many religions the Koran is believed to possess supernatural power, and it is used in various occult practices, which some claim the priests have instituted in order to hold their people in a state of superstition and ignorance, and to make use of their fears as a means to their own pecuniary ends. Whether or not the priests originated these practices, they have certainly in many cases encouraged the people to adhere to them and the result is that among the masses there is probably more faith in the magical uses of the book than there is understanding of its content.

The accepted forms of Koranic magic are the 'cutting the Koran' (*istikhara*), divination (*fal*), prayers, or portions written out and used as talismans, reading the Koran for magical results, and other special uses of the book itself.

The "cutting the Koran," or *istikhara*, is used to determine whether a proposed action is expedient. An individual who is anxious about some matter of business, or about his health, when at a loss to know what to do, gets a mulla or someone who has read a bit of the Koran to perform for him the



#### A KORAN AMULET

The famous verse used against the evil eye is in the centre (68 51 2) the Throne or *kursi* verse (2 255) is on the margins the four declarations *chahir qaul* (suras 109 112 113 and 114) are in the marginal corners and inside circles and Ali is pictured with his sword *dhul faqr* at the top



*istikhara* Old women who know some of the Arabic characters will do most of this work for women and villagers, but in the towns and cities there are always professional "readers" available. One of these men will read the first sura, then pray in Arabic, "God, thou knowest what is hidden!" He will then repeat a part of Sura 6:59. "And with Him are the keys of the secret things, none knoweth them but He. He knoweth whatever is on the land and in the sea." Then he will give the salutation to Muhammad and his household *Salallahu wa ahluhu wa alhi wa salaam*, "Prayer and peace be unto him and his people and his family." He will close his eyes, turn his face upwards and utter the name Allah while he draws his fingers from the back of the book up among its pages. He then opens where the fingers enter and reads the first sentence or part of a sentence on the page and from the character of the words he gives his inquirer an answer as to the outcome of the matter he is contemplating.

Some Korans are especially prepared for this purpose and have their pages marked with letters which indicate what the answer is to be. Some have only three letters *kh* (ح) for *khair*, meaning good; *sh* (س) for *shar*, meaning bad or unfavourable, and *mum* (م) for *mana*, signifying medium. Other copies have more details. Nine letters and combinations indicate very good, good, fair, medium, not good and bad. These signs simplify the reader's task and relieve him of the responsibility for an unfavourable interpretation.

People resort to *istikhara* most frequently in regard to matters of health and concerning medical or surgical treatment, but they use it also in connection with business undertakings, or in considering whether to accept employment, or form partnerships or make journeys. Nowadays it is commonly used to determine whether the particular automobile in which the journey is to be made is worthy.

As an example of its use in matters of health, a person goes to see a doctor and his case is diagnosed as one needing surgical treatment. He is so advised and arrangements are made for him to enter the hospital, but he excuses himself for the present, saying that he must go home and inform his family, and that he will return on the morrow. He does not return. Days, or maybe weeks, later he appears, ready for the operation and his story is that the *istikhara* repeatedly came out against the operation and that he could not come.



until he had obtained a favourable result. Sometimes the patient will take one unfavourable cutting of the book as final and the hospital will not see him again.

In the *Miftah al Jinan*, pages 361-390 are devoted to detailed directions for performing the *istikhara* with the Koran, as advised by the Imam Ja'far Sadik.

Divination, or *fal*, with the Koran is similar to the *istikhara*, but goes a step farther for it determines not only whether it is expedient to do a thing, but it reveals the whole character and progress of the proposed undertaking. Some of the more progressive people say that the *fal* is now very little used, but careful inquiry shows that it has diminished only slightly in its popularity. The diviner opens the Koran in the same way as for the *istikhara*, but instead of reading the first words or statement on the page, he turns to the beginning of the passage. If it seems good it means that the beginning of the undertaking will be auspicious. He then turns to the end of the passage to learn what the final outcome will be, and reads where he first opened to ascertain the character of the matter while in progress. The meanings are usually sufficiently ambiguous to be construed to fit any and every situation.

The use of particular verses of the Koran as written prayers and talismans is exceedingly common. There is a tradition that the Imam Husain wore Suras 113 and 114 about his neck as a talisman. Many people make their living as professional prayer writers. Books of instruction in the 'science' are abundant and easily obtained,<sup>3</sup> which give all the necessary directions as to what verses are efficacious and how they are to be prepared to meet different situations. Korans with marginal notes on the value of the verses opposite are also to be found. Often these books will not agree with each other as to the value of specified verses, and there are few of them that will be found to agree with the marginal notes in the Korans, thus there is plenty of latitude for the prayer writer.

As an example, the sura "Ya Sin," which is much used in Koranic magic, since it is called 'the heart of the Koran,' has the special value of each verse written on the margins of the pages in these prepared copies of the Koran. Not one of these directions agrees with those indicated in the *Mayma' al Dawat* which gives wide margins on three sides of nine

pages to the values of the verses of "Ya Sin" According to the Koran, verses 65 and 66 of "Ya Sin" are to be used as a protection from the tongues of slanderers if they are properly written on deer skin with saffron and rose water. But the *Majma' al Dawat* advises that the same verses are to be written on a paper and bound to the side of a person suffering with pneumonia, or the paper is to be washed and the water given to a dysentery patient to drink.

The directions for using the verses of this sura alone cover all the experiences of life, from an easy birth to a painless and peaceful death, and the journey on to bliss in heaven. They provide cures for all of man's illnesses, such as fevers, swellings, aches, blindness and insanity. When one is suffering from toothache, if verse 78 to the end of the sura is written on paper and hung over the ear on the side of the aching tooth, it will cure the pain. There are verses which protect one's property, one's household and one's person from jinn, div, and the evil eye.

There are verses also from other suras that are as great in aid as those from "Ya Sin". The suras most used are "Ya Sin" (36), "Merciful" (55), "The Victory" (48), "Divine Break" (89), "The News" (78) and "Jinn" (72). If the sura "Table" (5) be written out and put in a box containing valuables of any kind nothing can harm them and verse 267 of the sura "Cow," written on an earthenware vessel and put among clothing, will keep away moths. And verses 14 and 15 of this sura, if one writes them on the back of a turtle's shell and keeps it with him, then no one will be able to exercise the power of the evil eye upon him. And if the entire sura "Ya Sin" be written out and hung up in a garden, that garden will produce in abundance. Moreover, if it is kept on the person no illness nor dangerous animal will afflict the wearer.

There are ways also whereby hidden treasure may be found. Verse 9 of Sura 3, and all of Sura 95, should be written on paper and tied to the neck of a white rooster with a double comb. The rooster is then let loose in a place where it is suspected that a treasure is hidden, and he will go and stand over the very place. If he is right he will die the next day and the treasure seeker may dig for the treasure with perfect assurance.

On journeys one may be kept from thirst by writing verse 6 of the second sura on a clean paper or on a glass dish. He should then wash the writing with spring water and put it

into a glass, after three days he should mix it with attar of roses and the milk of a red goat, and he should boil this mixture until it becomes thick and black, then if some of this is eaten every morning, the traveller will not thirst. If one is journeying on foot, he should bind verse 25 of the sura "Ya Sin" to his feet, and he can then walk any desired distance and not suffer fatigue. If he journeys by sea, storms may be calmed by using verses 256-260 of the sura "Caw" (2). These verses will also keep away beggars and dervishes on the road. Drought and famine and flood cannot harm the one who gives attention to the proper verses, and the one who wears verse 48 of Ya Sin, even though the whole world be flooded, not even the soles of his feet shall be wet.

A good number of verses protect from hunger and thirst here on earth, but there are more for that terrible thirst on the Day of Judgment. Plagues and pests can have no power if other specified verses are used. As when verses 1 and 2 of Sura 16 are written very finely on deer skin two hours after sunrise on Thursday morning and put under a stone set in a ring or if they are written on the stone itself, no enemy can successfully plan anything against him. If one writes the 58th verse of "Ya Sin" which is called the heart of the sura and therefore the heart of the Koran in the form of a square at sunset and keeps it on his person no snake, scorpion or other injurious animal will molest him. The desire for physical strength, bravery, victory in war, wealth, position and knowledge may be satisfied by the use of other parts. For example, if the sura "Jonah" be written twenty one times and kept on the person the wearer will not only be victorious in war, but he will win great glory by his deeds of bravery. Physical strength is obtained by writing verse 10 of sura "Ya Sin" on paper, then tying it up with blue cord and burying it in an old grave. In the same way the memory can be strengthened and ability to learn may be increased.

In fact a short road to learning is readily provided, for if one writes verses 109-112 of the sura "Table" (5) on a black stone, on the first Friday of the month at the hour of sunset, and wears it habitually, he will become famous as a scholar and will know the secret of sciences he never knew existed. Likewise the fearful may be made courageous and calm especially those who fear death and the grave. Those who sorrow may again be happy. Light slumbers may be had to

enable one to rise for the stated prayers, and tasks that are difficult may be made easy. Strength may be gained to control the temper and ability may be acquired to hold the tongue against the desire to lie or slander.

Matters pertaining to marriage have not been omitted. If a young man wants a wife he should write verses 87-89 of the sura "Women" (4) on a piece of a garment belonging to a young married woman and this he should keep near him while investigations are being made to procure a wife for him. Thus he is sure to get the right one and one who will love him. A woman who desires to keep the love and respect of her husband can also find means whereby her desire may be obtained. If two friends have quarrelled, reconciliation may be achieved by one of them writing on an earthen vessel that is fresh from the kiln with a reed pen that has been dipped into unboiled honey, the name of the other person and around it the tenth verse of the sura "Cow" (2). Then he must throw the vessel into the well out of which the other party drinks, and his heart will be made soft and they will soon again be friends.

Another's secrets may be found out by writing verse 7 of this same sura on a green mud bowl, washing it in running water and sprinkling it upon the person when he is asleep. The suspected one, should he be concealing a dark secret or be planning some evil deed, will tell it all. Also there are several other verses, which, if written on the skin of a frog and put upon the stomach of a sleeping person, will cause him to tell everything he is trying to conceal.

The malicious side of magic is sometimes indulged in. Provision is made to hinder the business undertakings of others, to bring about the destruction of an enemy's house or to cause his death. Write verses 122-124 of the sura "Imran" (3) on an old water pot or on a piece of horse skin, put it into the enemy's house and his property will be ruined. If the death of another is desired read Sura 2: 256-260 twenty-nine times and it will happen. Or on Tuesday at sunset a man makes a mask of his enemy's face out of plaster of Paris, writes verses 30-33 of Sura 5 on the face of the image and the enemy's name on the back of it, he sticks a dagger into the head where the name is written, at the same time saying, "O angels of God, do this to this person," and the enemy will be struck dead. By similar performances they believe

officers may be removed from their positions. If one has an enemy in prison, he writes verse 36 of sura "Araf" (7), together with the enemy's name and his mother's name, on the tanned skin of a red kid and buries it, and as long as it remains buried the enemy will remain in prison.

Twenty nine suras have Arabic characters, single or in combination, at their beginning. Rodwell remarks that they may be "private marks or initials of proprietors of copies furnished to Sa'id, when effecting his rescension of the text under Othman. In the same way, letters prefixed to other suras may be monograms, or abbreviations or initial letters of the names of the person to whom the respective suras belonged". Some Iranians say they are a form of riddle. Whatever their true significance, the Shi'ites have made commerce of them, claiming that these fourteen characters are light possessing and light giving, and that they formed the code by means of which God gave his words to the Prophet. They are therefore called the "bright ones". The power of this code whether written or read, is believed to afford protection from thieves and from disaster at sea, to provide plenty of the means of living, and to safeguard a person from enemies, from plots, and from all injurious animals. It is written on four pages of paper and placed to the north, east, south and west about a field or garden to cause locusts to leave the place.

To the substances already mentioned, on which verses are written, there may be added stones, dry clay, iron, silver and copper, which are also much used for these written prayers. Various kinds of cloth, such as white muslin, a war banner, red cloth from Kashmir or Indo China, and linen or home spun cloth from Yemen, are preferred for more unusual cases. If the whole of the sura "Ya Sin" be written on a white muslin shirt, no bullet can penetrate it. There is a story that when one of the border tribes was causing trouble several years ago in Khorasan, troops were sent to capture the leader, who had become notorious. When he was located, and the soldiers took aim to fire upon him, their guns would not go off. This is said to have happened repeatedly, until it occurred to one of the soldiers that he was, perhaps, protected in some magical manner. The captain of the force then aimed at the brigand's hand. His rifle responded, the brigand's hand was shattered and they were soon able to capture him.

They declared that he was protected by one of these bullet proof shirts, and only his hands were vulnerable

There are also particular parts of animals, other than those mentioned, upon which prayers are sometimes written, such as camel bones, and the shoulder blades and the neck vertebræ of sheep. Vegetable substances employed are the olive, fig and green date woods, a few fruits and the date bud. Some foods are also good for this purpose, such as *halva*, a sweetmeat that is made from whole wheat flour with grease and sugar, rock candy from Egypt, and a round loaf of saltless bread.

The liquids with which prayers are written are rosewater, musk, saffron, ink, honey, the juice of mint, the juice of the white grape, and grease. Rain water, spring water, water from a well that is low, or water which has been caught from a drain pipe may be used to wash the written prayers. Usually this water is given to the person who is concerned to drink, and not infrequently the prayer itself, is the paper upon which the verse was written is called, must be eaten. Sometimes the water is poured over the person's head as he faces Mecca.

Reading the Koran carries with it great merit. There are as many suggestions to be found in the marginal notes for reading whole suras, or selected verses as there are for writing them. Most of this reading should be done at stated times and a stipulated number of times, 41 seems to be the favourite number, but 7, 21, 29, 40, 70 and 1000 are recommended almost as often. The reader of the first sura gains all the merit that is attached to the reading of the Taurat (the Pentateuch), the Zabur (the Psalms), the Injil (the Gospels) and, strange to say, the Koran! It is related that Muhammad himself told some of his friends that if he should write out all the meanings of the first sura, it would take seventy camels to carry the load, and he added that whoever reads this sura is free from the fires of hell. From one of the traditions it is related that the entire Koran is in this first sura, and that all of the sura is in the first word, *bismilla*, 'In the name of God' and the entire meaning of it is in the dot of the first letter, *ب*. And Ali said, "I am that dot." Verse 256 of the second sura is called the Throne (*kursi*) Verse, and whoever reads it will have all his needs supplied. It has ten pauses in reading it, and at each pause

one should bend a finger into the palm of the hand, beginning with the little finger of the right hand and ending with the thumb of the left hand, and when both hands are thus closed, the salutation to Muhammad and his household should be said three times. This should be followed by the reading of the first sura ten times, and after each reading one finger should be allowed to come out, but in the reverse order from that in which they were drawn in. Then all fingers should be pointed upward, and the suppliant should blow his breath upon them, and then express all his needs and desires. If this is done for forty days everything will be his. Also the reading of the fourth sura, 'Women,' is said to give the reader the merit of a martyr killed in the service of God, while the reading of the third sura, 'Imran,' gives the merit of a thousand martyrs.

It is claimed that the importance of the number of times a sura is read is like following the directions for locating a hidden treasure. If the treasure is forty steps away it cannot be reached by thirty nine, and forty one will overstep it and it will not be found, it must be reached by forty.

If one is faced by a grave situation and reads verse 140 of the third sura forty times a day for forty days, the gravity of the situation will be removed, if he reads it twenty nine times a day for twenty nine days, his enemies will be removed, if he reads it nineteen times a day for nineteen days, he will be granted great physical strength, if he reads it ten times a day for ten days, he will become wealthy in flocks, and if he reads it five times a day for five days, he and his family will be granted health.

Likewise the reading of the sura "Jinn" is most important. If a prisoner reads it, he will soon be set free, if a man with a bank account reads it, his money will be safe, but the greatest blessing from reading it is that one's faith is greatly increased.

It is related that Muhammad said that on the Judgment Day God will not account with the person who reads "Ya Sin" but will grant him forgiveness and will make him an intercessor for many others. The sura *al Saff* (37), if combined with "Ya Sin," and if read over the head of one who is dying, will quickly bring an end to his suffering and will allow him to pass away quietly.

The sura "Ya Sin" has seven parts, each ending with the

word *mubin*, which means open or clear. If one has an enemy he wishes to harm and that without injury to himself, or one whose love he wishes to gain, he reads this sura and at each *mubin* he ties a knot in a cord he has ready at hand. When the reading is completed he nails the cord into the ground, and he gets his desire.

Another tradition tells us that God grants forgiveness, not only to the parents of anyone who reads the book, but to seventy generations of his ancestors. A story is told of the Imam Ja'far Sâdîk that one day he saw a sinful man being tormented by the angels, he became angry because the man was a believer. Later on when one of his companions saw that his anger had subsided, he asked him the reason, the Imam answered that the man was no longer tormented but was forgiven and was receiving all the blessings of God. And why? Because his small son had gone to school and had read one verse from the Koran!

While most of the foregoing has had to do with the suras and verses of the Koran, there are other practices which require the book itself. At the vernal equinox which is the Persian New Year one should have a Koran in his lap when the gun gives the signal that "the year has changed." This gives him good luck for the coming year and this blessing may be increased if he has learning for by reading the sura 'Yâ Sin' at this time he is given the assurance that he will remain secure in his employment for the whole year.

The Koran, or a fragment of a few pages will suffice is put under the pillow of a woman in child birth, so the delivery will be made easy, and so the dreaded witch Âl will not be able to harm either the mother or child for the same purpose the holy book is sometimes held over the woman's head and the pages are slowly turned. Or water is poured over the cover of a Koran and allowed to drop from each corner into a bowl. This water is believed to possess the power to remove every evil influence. It will even remove the power of any of the verses of the Koran itself! The entire book in a tiny edition is often put into a gold or silver box and worn around the neck as an ornament or it is put into a case and bound upon the arm. This is considered a most efficient talisman and able to protect the wearer from all evil but when it is contained in an iron box, then nothing in earth or heaven can harm the wearer!



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sura 85 21 22

<sup>2</sup> See chapter on Divination and Exorcism

<sup>3</sup> As for example, the *Majma' al Dawat* and the *Jam' al Dawat*

<sup>4</sup> Rodwell's Koran p 32, note 3

<sup>5</sup> *Minhaj al Sadikin*, chapter of 'Tawhîd'

## CHAPTER XVII

### TREES AND PLANTS

THE Iranians are great lovers of plants and trees, and in their ancient writings there are frequent references to them—how they were set out, cared for and revered. Many marvellous stories are related about the age of particular trees, and one is constrained to almost believe them when he gazes upon the immense gnarled trunks and the huge twisted protruding roots of some of the old plane trees that are to be seen in Iran today.

The planting of trees is usually done according to the signs of the zodiac. In a book on agriculture that was published in 1902,<sup>1</sup> the directions for planting trees by the positions of the stars are given in verse. When he puts a sapling into the ground, the devout Muslim will repeat a verse from the Koran, and when a gardener puts a plant into the earth, he will say *Ahuda* ( God ' )! When one of them was asked why he did this, he replied, "Whether it grows or not is with God, so I speak His name when I plant it."

There are trees which have long been regarded as holy, with some of them this is because of their particular variety, and with others it is because of an event which has taken place under their branches, or nearby. The fig and the olive are holy because God swore by them (Sura 95 1). The fig is the fruit of heaven. The date and the pomegranate are also holy. It is claimed that the fig and the date possess intelligence and that they are just a step removed from the animal kingdom. Trees that bear fruit or produce oil are also sacred, in that they are a blessing to mankind. Olive oil is holy and for that reason it is much used in magical rites. Talismans are washed in it, sometimes it is solemnly burned, and frequently the formulæ which appear upon talismans are written with olive oil.

The lotus tree, which is called the *sidra* in the Koran (53 16), is the tree of Paradise, it is in the seventh heaven, upon the loftiest point, on the right hand of the throne of God. Its

leaves are said to be as numerous as the members of the human family, each one bears the name of an individual, and every year, on the night of the 15th of Ramadan, this tree is shaken and the leaves that fall are the ones upon which are written the names of those who are to die during the ensuing year.<sup>2</sup> Water in which the leaves of the *sudra* have been steeped is frequently used for bathing a corpse. This is done to help preserve the body, and it is also a work of merit and it pleases the angels.

Senna leaves are used as medicine and those which are brought from Mecca are regarded as sacred. The oil of sesame is also sacred, and a person gains merit either by burning or by eating it. There is a special sweetmeat that is fried in it during the month of Ramadan, and to eat this also brings merit. And the cyprus (or pine) is sacred, because it is ever green—caused by the water of life which ran down its trunk.<sup>3</sup>

Other trees are sacred because of their connection with some special event. They are called *Murad dahanda*, or 'desire giving' trees. Perhaps at one time a holy man, or a descendant of the Prophet, sat under such a tree, or ate of its fruit or used its leaves for healing, or in its shade he may have prayed or slept or dreamed. Sooner or later either he himself or some simple villager was ready to regard it as holy and thus it came to be venerated. It is called the 'desire giving' because the credulous, the afflicted and the needy, who have heard the story about it, tie rags and strings to its branches, and at the same time they make a request and take a vow that they will perform some meritorious act if the request is granted. There are many such trees in Iran, and it is said that some of them have been so bound with these rags that they have suffocated and died.

The fruit of all sacred trees may be eaten, and the leaves are used for healing, but it is considered to be a sin to break off a branch. Trees which grow from graves, and there are many that grow from the graves of poets, are held in such reverence that people are deterred from cutting them.

Exceedingly large and very old trees are really regarded with awe by the simple people, for they are believed to be inhabited by tribes of the jinn. This is especially true if they stand near the desert or the sea. In 1931 the story was related in Meshed that a man in a nearby village had died in a peculiar manner, he had not been ill, but suddenly and without

any apparent cause he began to waste rapidly away. This was first noticed three days after he had finished cutting down a large *chinar* or plane tree. His neighbours had pleaded with him not to cut it, on account of possible dire consequences, but he had laughed at their fears. The villagers declared that his death was due to the jinn who had lived in the tree, who had taken revenge because he had demolished their habitation.

Similarly villagers claim that it is dangerous to cut a walnut tree, and Europeans who may wish to pitch their tents under these trees are strongly advised not to do so, because it is believed that a person will die before his time, or will become an invalid, if he spends much time under a walnut tree.

Again we note that very old trees, particularly if many birds nest in them, must not be cut down—so also with those trees that are in any way a benefit to mankind, for whoever does so will surely hasten his death. In illustration of this an interesting story is related in the traditions. Almost any Iranian in Khorasan can tell it in one form or another. In the time of Harun al Rashid,<sup>4</sup> an old tree stood near to the town of Turshiz, it was a cypress and was said to have been planted by Zoroaster. This tree was widely revered on account of its age, and many birds built their nests in it. But Harun al Rashid wanted this cypress for some work that he was having done in Baghdad. The Zoroastrians protested earnestly, saying that it was a holy tree and that they were ready to give a large sum of money if he would not cut it down. But the reply came, "Since it is the Caliph's order it must be done." It took, however, a long time to trim this tree and to cut it up, and the birds continued to build their nests and to hatch their young. But at last the wood was all ready to be despatched by camels to Baghdad, when a messenger arrived to tell them not to cut the tree, because the Caliph was dead. The people believed of course that his death was in direct punishment for cutting the holy tree, and it is the general opinion that if a tree which the people revere is cut down, disastrous results will follow.

As a sanitary precaution it is said that no filth should be allowed under a fruit tree when there is fruit upon it, and it is believed that if wild onions are planted at the roots of apple trees, then worms cannot get into the fruit.

Medicinal and magical uses of fruits are considered side by side in the beliefs of the people. Figs should be eaten to cure hemorrhoids, to clear the complexion, and to make one fat—so said the Prophet, and one may also rid himself of lice by eating figs. Pomegranates, when eaten with the white tissue, cleanse the stomach, and every seed that enters the stomach helps to enlighten the heart, to keep one free from the temptations of Satan and firm in his faith for a period of forty days. The skins of the pomegranate are put into wheat bins to keep away worms. The quince is good for the complexion and, according to Muhammad, it cleanses the soul. If a pregnant woman drinks frequently of its juice, her child will be bright, honest, brave and good. Dates are used at the time of child birth, the new mother must eat three of them, because tradition says that Mary gave birth to Jesus under a date tree, and that she ate three dates from that tree.

The *zegl* or wart tree, which some say is the medlar and others claim is a variety of elm, is said to cure warts. In Khorasan the practice is to pound a piece of the wood to powder and to rub it onto the wart. Some carry with them a piece of the wood, thinking that its very proximity to the wart may cause it to disappear, others throw mud upon the tree, and after rubbing a knife upon the trunk they rub the wart with this knife. There are several of these particular trees that are seemingly well known. People will mention one that is near Teheran, another in Mazanderan near the Caspian, and another in Khorasan, near the Turkoman border.

English walnuts are said to cure scrofula and the oil of the olive will cure every illness except that one by which a person is destined to die. It is related that Adam was suffering with pain and complained to God, Gabriel descended from heaven with an olive tree and presented it to Adam and told him to plant it, to pick the fruit, to extract the oil and to use it whenever he had pain, assuring him that it would be a cure for all ills. And now, if the water in which olive leaves have been boiled is sprinkled about the house and courtyard, there will be no flies. The oleander will also drive away flies.

The gum of the wild olive is a cure for hemorrhoids and is considered particularly healing if rubbed upon wounds. But

if rats or mice eat it they will die Charred peach stones are put on the navel to cure diarrhoea If ground almonds are mixed with the milk of a mother who has a baby girl and are then rubbed on the eyes, they will cure trachoma In the same way lemon skin may be rubbed upon the forehead to cure headache The fruit of the jujube tree may be mixed with the leaves of marigold and be used to relieve itching Balls of sawdust from the pine tree are put into flour to keep away worms An oil from the seeds of the plane tree is rubbed upon bites from sandflies or mosquitoes and the root of the date palm is boiled and mixed with flour to form a cooling poultice

When a fruit tree has borne no fruit for two or three years, it is common for someone to come along and pretend to cut it down, but another person will protest, seize his hand and beg him not to cut it, as undoubtedly it will bear the next year, which many say it often does

Many plants, other than trees have their various special uses take for example the onion There are definite directions for the new mother when she goes to the public bath, to step on an onion as she descends the stairs And a cold may be cured by throwing an onion on the roof of a neighbour's house, and at the same time asking someone who is standing by "Which goes up the mountain better a goat or a thief?" Whichever answer is given he then says "Give the cold to that one" and it will be cured But a person must not eat a raw onion on Friday or the angels will not remain with him However, he who eats onions for forty one Sundays will become a *hadjî*, or pilgrim to Mecca

So also if one eats radishes he will never have albumen in the urine, asafetida cures tuberculosis, garlic is worn about the neck during a cholera epidemic, with the idea that the odour is disinfecting, so that it may suddenly advance to twenty times its usual price hollyhock leaves are pasted upon heads that are afflicted with favus mulberry leaves are used on carbuncles cotton husks are burned and put on the *salak*, the oriental or Baghdad boil, the green leaves of the attar rose may be pasted upon the oriental boil to draw out the pus Oil of sesame and gum tragacanth are used together to make a poultice to reduce swellings Cotton seed and barley water form a poultice for abscesses A rose if wrapped in a piece of linen with hot pebbles, may be used

effectively as a massage for rheumatic joints, and saffron may be eaten in quantity to cause one to laugh

Leaves of the madder and the indigo plant are pounded together and given to guests to rub on their eyebrows to make them happy during their visit. The castor bean is rubbed on the head of a noisy rooster to make him unable to crow

There are plants that bring misfortune and that should not be planted in the yard, among them are the sunflower, the morning glory, the egg plant, and formerly the tomato

Spices are widely utilized both as cures and preventives. Ginger, cinnamon, cardamom and cloves are mixed with honey to cure hysteria, and the one who is so afflicted is to eat a spoonful of the mixture every morning. The 'cinnamon vendor' is now passing out, but he used to be a familiar character in the narrow streets, as he carried his steaming brass samovar and his tray of small glasses and called out "*Dalchin* (cinnamon)! *Dalchin*!" Women and girls would come out of their houses into the street to buy a glass of hot cinnamon, and men from shops and those passing along would stop for a drink of the cinnamon brew. This was to tone up the system and to make the drinker less susceptible to disease. Spices still provide a special feature at weddings, New Year's celebrations and funerals.

Of the wild plants, tea is made from hound's tongue for colic, from pennyroyal for cramps, and from wild mustard for common colds. When women go to the mountains for an outing they spend a good share of their time gathering the herbs which they take home and dry for their winter's supply of medicine.

Other wild plants are used solely for magical purposes, and the most conspicuous among these is the wild rue. This plant grows in abundance over the desert, and people of almost every locality can get as much of the seed as they need, just for the gathering. The seeds are burned over hot coals and the smoke is allowed to circle about the person or persons concerned. It is believed to have the power to ward off evil. "Job's tears" and mandrake are also among the wild plants which are used in black magic, the mandrake is sometimes put into the husband's food with the intention of turning him against a co wife.<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Majma'yi Ilm-i Irani dar Filahat wa Ziarat by Majma' Dawla

<sup>2</sup> Rodwell's Koran p 69 note

<sup>3</sup> Cf chapter on Kaf

<sup>4</sup> According to Kazwini it was the Caliph Mutawakkil who had this tree felled and brought to Samarra Cf Donaldson The Shi'ite Religion p 243

<sup>5</sup> Cf chapter on Marriac



## CHAPTER XVIII

### STONES AND METALS

THE veneration and worship of stones is a custom that is almost as ancient as man himself, and among the Iranians it is still widespread. Scattered all over the country there are stones which, on account of shape, colour or special marking, have been separated from other stones and have gradually become objects of veneration. Stories concerning many of these stones have found place in the traditions, for they have become a real part of Islamic worship.

One of the most outstanding stones of this kind is the one at Kadamgah, the "place of the footstep," which is a village about twenty miles east of Nishapur, on the main pilgrim road to Meshed. While there are several variations of the story as it is told by writers and by Iranians themselves, the following version is from one who had repeatedly visited the pilgrimage places. When the Imam Rida was on his way to Tus, the capital of Khorasan, he stopped at Kadamgah. A stone, which travellers and muleteers and camel drivers had repeatedly used in building up their temporary stoves, began to speak and to complain to the Imam because it was always in the fire and because it received no respect from anyone. The Imam stepped upon it and said, "You shall henceforth be honoured" and behold the print of his foot remained upon it. This imprint in the hard stone was to give witness in the future to the Imam's power.

In the same village there was a fire temple. The Zoroastrians realized that a miracle had been performed, so they hid the stone. Generations later the Imam himself appeared to Shah Abbas the Great and told him of the importance of this stone, and indicated to him where it was hidden. There it was found and a shrine was built over it and it became a place of pilgrimage. Even today, when most of the pilgrims travel by motor bus, they insist on stopping at Kadamgah long enough to climb up to the little shrine and worship before the sacred stone. It has been kissed and rubbed

by so many thousands that it has become smooth and polished

A similar stone is enshrined in a niche in the wall on one of the narrow streets in Meshed, which bears marks like the imprint of a hand, with five digits. Some say that it was made by Ali's hand, and others say that it is from the hand of the Imam Rida. Barren women, and those who have lost all their children, burn candles or grease lamps in this niche in fulfilment of vows they have made there previously. People in pain will place their hands upon this stone and then rub them upon the place affected.

Throughout the country there are many such stones, which bear the supposed imprints of a hand or foot of one of the Imams, or of one of the members of their families. About fifty miles from Meshed there are warm springs where sick people go for treatment. It is related that Ali went there once,<sup>1</sup> and knelt for prayer upon a certain stone and that the imprint of his knees has remained. At the same place they brought him melons to eat, which had been prepared in the customary way of cutting the pulp into squares, all ready to be taken with the fingers. But at the moment an enemy appeared and Ali fled, leaving the melons on a rock. They were changed into stone and are still shown to visitors.

Also the story is told that Ma'sumah, the sister of the Imam Rida, was travelling across Iran to visit her brother in Tus. At Kumm, where her caravan stopped, she was seized with a severe pain. The woman at whose house she was stopping was asked to go to the apothecary shop for some wild mustard seed to brew for tea to give to the suffering Ma'sumah. The woman said she was sorry she could not leave her dough, which was just ready for the baking. Ma'sumah told her that she would attend to that, so the woman left the house and went for the medicine, and when she returned, not only was the bread baked, but the house was full of bread, much more than the dough could possibly have made. As a memento of this deed some of the balls of dough were changed into stone, and several round stones are exhibited there to this day in confirmation of the miracle.<sup>1</sup>

Still another stone in Meshed bears the imprint of the hand of the Imam Rida. It is white and is embedded in the wall which surrounds a small courtyard that has been set aside for it near the Shrine of the Imam. Pilgrims to the Shrine

visit this stone also. And near a small village in the Nishapur range of mountains is a stone about which stands a much dilapidated mud wall. It is said that when Ali was hunting in this region he tied his horse, Duldul, to this stone, and it has become, therefore, an object of veneration.

Within the sacred precincts at Kerbala is a white stone with which Fatima, when in pain, rubbed her body to relieve her suffering. It too, is embedded in a wall, and suffering people visit it and rub their hands upon it and then upon the places where they have pain.

Near the Shrine of the Imam Ridā is another large white stone. It is related that the Imam poured milk over an ordinary grey stone and it turned white, and mothers who do not have sufficient milk for their babies visit this stone. And close to this is the stone upon which the Imam sat after he had eaten the poisoned grapes. As he writhed in agony upon it the stone turned green from the poison which had saturated his body. People go to this stone for divining purposes, and if anyone has some strong desire he will visit it, and with his two hands he will raise it three times. If he lifts it easily he will obtain his desire, but if he must exert great effort the results will be doubtful, whereas if he cannot lift it at all, then it is evident that his longing is in vain. And there is a large flat stone in the same vicinity that is sacred, because the body of the Imam was bathed upon it and made ready for burial.<sup>3</sup>

Stories abound that tell how Ali, or some other one of the Imams, would strike a rock and water would come gushing forth, and many of the splendid springs that flow from rock crevices and supply "sweet water" to the surrounding fertile regions are attributed to the miraculous power of one of the saints. The warm springs near Meshed are said to be the result of a stroke of Ali's sword *dhu l faka*.

Stones themselves are believed to make the pilgrimage to the shrine of the Imam at Meshed. A common question is, "Have you not seen, out on the desert roads, stones rolling towards the city?" Many declare that they have frequently witnessed such phenomena. And sometimes a stone will suddenly appear in the courtyard of the shrine, apparently it has arrived during the night, for it is observed in the morning by someone whose business it is to notice it. He immediately informs all those within hearing, just as it has

been started down an incline which brings it nearer the holy place, and enthusiasts who may be present help it along its course. It is said that there is a room within the shrine area that is full of these stones.

Black stones also play an important part in religious and superstitious belief and they are customarily regarded with great awe. Much has been written about the famous *hajar al aswad*, or 'Black Stone,' that millions of pilgrims have sought to kiss since pre-Islamic times. Evil-doers are believed to be transformed at times into black stones and a story that supports this belief is told concerning the tomb of Bibi Shirin-banu, the daughter of Yazdigird and the reputed wife of the twelfth Imam. Her tomb is in the shrine at Shah Abdul Azim, near Teheran. Only women are allowed to enter this shrine, but a large black stone there recalls the fact that at one time a man did enter the place, and for his presumption he was transformed at once into stone. A similar story is connected with the tomb of Abbas, as is related in the chapter on "Oaths."

Black stones are used in magic also. When Friday falls upon the first day of the month, verses 109-112 of Sura 5 are written upon a black stone and the possessor of that stone will become an authority in sciences which he never knew existed.<sup>1</sup> Another black or dark red stone is called the *sang-e bawd* ('stone of the swelling'), which is moistened and rubbed upon any place where there is an inflammation. The old stone lions in Hamadan and in Meshed, and the practices that are connected with them, are described in the chapter on "Birth."

Cairns, those piles of stone which are seen along all well travelled roads, were put up in the beginning as works of merit in removing troublesome stones from the roadway. Now the idea of clearing the road no longer prompts the act, but rather the desire to build an 'eternal house.' They are piled up by travellers at the top of a pass, or when the last stage of a long journey is reached and they arrive at a point where the view before them opens wide and gives them the first glimpse of their destination, then out of gratitude that their journey is over, a symbol of the 'eternal house' is built. At a distance of twelve to fifteen miles to the south of Meshed, on the main pilgrim road, where the first view of the golden dome is obtained, there are acres of these cairns which pilgrims have piled up year after year.

## PRECIOUS STONES

Among the numerous precious and semi precious stones which the Iranians esteem for their supposed power in magic, the *agate* stands first. Undoubtedly their regard for it dates back to very ancient times, but Muhammadans particularly respect their Prophet's belief in the efficacy of this stone. In the traditions it is related that one day a man came to him and told him that while he was journeying thieves had robbed him of everything he possessed. Muhammad asked him why he did not wear an agate ring, because it would protect him from all evil. He advised everyone to wear an agate ring. One time Ali asked the Prophet what agate was, and he received the reply that it was a mountain in Yemen which gives witness to the unity of God, proclaims the apostleship of Muhammad, witness to the Imamite of Ali and his heirs, and promises Paradise for the Shi'ites and hell for their enemies<sup>4</sup>.

The wearing of agate not only protects the wearer from all evil, but it brings merit as well and for this reason many people wear rings set with agate. The stone is cut into various shapes, such as beads and long bars with holes drilled in them so that they may be readily strung onto bracelets or those elaborate necklaces that were formerly so commonly worn. Agate is believed to be able to keep one free from the annoyance of beggars and dervishes when travelling. Furthermore, it will protect the traveller from accident, it will close the mouths of false witnesses, it will keep one from want and poverty, and if it is heated and rubbed on the eyeball any diseases of the eye can be cured.

The best agate is procured from Yemen—it is redder and brighter and its power is greater than of any other kind, it removes enmity and causes one to triumph in every crisis. Ali is said to have worn an agate from Yemen to protect himself from evil strangers and from unforeseen calamity. It is claimed that if a person who is wearing a Yemen agate approaches an oven where bread is baking the dough will not stick but will fall from the oven wall into the fire.

The *turquoise* is also highly valued for its magic power. It is much worn and it is claimed that the wearer will never want and that he will be kept happy. After the strain of long continued work one should look at a turquoise to rest the

eyes and to restore their keenness of sight It is related that Ali wore a turquoise ring to secure needed help and to assure victory in battle But there is a saying that royalty should not wear the turquoise, because the glory of the ruler will be diminished by the greater glory of the stone

*Serpentine* is worn because it is believed that it will cure the bites of poisonous insects, spiders, scorpions and snakes Some claim that the wearer will not even be approached by dangerous animals, but should one be bitten or stung when unprotected, the injured spot should be thoroughly rubbed with this stone

*Jade* is said to cure thirst, and it is therefore valuable to have on a journey If it is worn under the clothing it will give protection also from the evil eye A piece of it may be moistened and put upon an infant's abdomen to cure colic And it is claimed that many kings have been victorious in wars because they wore jade

The *alexandrite* protects the wearer from the evils of jinn and devils

*Onyx* is cut into shapes to simulate the eye and is much worn to ward off the power of the evil eye In this shape it is called *Baba qur* "father of avarice"

The wearer of the *ruby* will make many friends A common poetic couplet says

Yakut safat bash kah dar jumla ahwal  
Az atash wa az ab mar i oura darari nist

Like the ruby ever be  
In fire or water danger free

*Crystal* will cure toothache

*Coral* cures fits and insanity

*Milky Quartz* which is called the milk stone, is often seen on babies to insure a sufficient supply of their mothers' milk

So also stones that are found in the bodies of animals are believed to possess peculiar magic powers The *snake seal*, *muhr i mar*, which is found in the heads of some snakes, is highly esteemed and is used to cure the bites of any poisonous animal, the bitten spot is to be moistened with water and the stone is to be laid upon it Also the memory may be strengthened by wearing one of these stones, and stones in the bladder may be made to crumble by its power There are people who will cut open their flesh so as to put two small

pieces of this stone, about the size of grains of wheat, into the incision, and then they draw the skin together and allow the wound to heal. Anyone who will do this is supposed to be protected from all evil, even from the power of a despotic ruler. And when this same snake seal stone is worn as an ornament, it has the power to keep a lover faithful !

A blue stone, if found in the crop of a chicken, is able to restore reason to a disordered mind. It protects also from the evil eye, and if it is put under the pillow of an infant who will not go to sleep, or who is afraid to be left alone, it will soon quiet him.

Stones are frequently found in swallows' nests. If they should be white or red they are thought to be valuable as a cure for tuberculosis.

According to the *ulama*, or "learned ones," there are stones to make fat and stones to make lean, stones to stop bleeding and those to reduce swelling, stones to cure tuberculosis and those to cure leprosy, stones to cure blindness and also insanity, stones to dissolve and break those in the bladder, stones to produce pregnancy and to insure easy delivery, stones to make the hair grow and stones to produce rain, stones to help one keep awake and those to produce sleep, stones to keep thieves at a distance and stones to rid the house of mice and rats—and there are other stones to remove the power of all these that have been mentioned.

The planets are said to exert influence over stones, black or dark coloured stones get their colour from Saturn, green stones owe their colour to Jupiter, red stones are coloured by Mars, blue stones by Venus, yellow stones by the Sun and white stones by the Moon.

## METALS

In this connection should be included those metals which are regarded as possessing magic power. *Iron* and *steel* lead all the other metals, and references have been made in other chapters to the uses made of various articles of iron. The magnet is especially esteemed as a means of drawing friends together, and of preserving peace and happiness in the house. Jinn flee from either steel or iron, therefore it is well to wear one of these as a talisman. The iron key that is tied to the horn of a good cow is to protect her from the

look of envy or of admiration. Rings and ear rings of iron are worn for protection against sickness and injury. A woman wears an iron bracelet to comfort her in her husband's absence and also to keep him faithful to her while he is away. An iron disc with numbers and talismanic signs cut into it, is put onto hot coals then the name of an absent one whom the person desires to have return is spoken over it, so as the iron grows warm the heart of the wanderer warms toward his home and a longing to return takes possession of him. An iron box, with a tiny Koran in it is considered to be the most powerful of all talismans.

There are some Iranians who say that much of their faith in the magic power of iron is derived from Aristotle, whom Kazwini reports as saying that if a piece of iron is worn as a talisman the wearer will be free from fear and he will become strong, his ambition will increase and he will not have bad dreams nor jump in his sleep, and moreover he will be honoured among men.

Iron will cure weak eyes, trachoma, deafness, hemorrhoids and tuberculosis. If hot water is cooled with a piece of iron, this water will cure ailments of the spleen and the drinker thereof will put on flesh.

And it was observed that a metal spear may be kept from rusting by rubbing it with a red hot nail.

Steel is claimed to be the most beneficial of metals. It is cut into shapes to be set in rings, which are often inscribed with a name of God, or the names of the "Five" or some magic numbers or formulæ. In this form it is believed to be all powerful, and Majlisi relates that Ali wore such a ring, which was the source of his mighty strength. So also a steel knife is a perfect protection for a child who is left at home alone and a knife is put under the pillow of a new born babe, in fact, it is in evidence at the time of delivery, to keep away the jinn Al.

*Silver* is much used in magic. Many charms are mounted in silver, because the metal adds its power to that of the mounted talisman and talismanic formulæ, some of them most elaborate, are often cut in silver for the same reason.

*Gold*, according to Kazwini, will cure fits and insanity will give courage, and if it is worn about the neck it will cure small pox. If the needle used to blacken the eyelids should be of gold, not only will the lids be beautiful, but the



eyes will be bright and they will look kindly upon others The ear should be pierced with a golden needle, for then the hole will never grow together It is advisable to keep a piece of gold in the mouth to cure bad breath, also shortness of breath will be relieved and stomach pains will be cured

And a golden ring that is fastened to a baby's cap will cure jaundice Also if a baby has dysentery, golden rings are put into the water it is to drink

*Lead* is used both in medicine and in magic It is employed for eyes that are watery and weak, and it is also used as a cosmetic Its preparation for cosmetic use is traced to Aristotle, and it was Muhammad who said that it would increase the lashes and would make the sight keener If it is put into water with cucumber seeds and that water is sprinkled about the place, fleas will not remain The dross of lead may be used at times to rub upon wounds, it will clear the complexion, and it can be utilized to remove body odour

*Copper and brass* are also used at times as bases for talismans on which magical formulæ are inscribed

Several other mineral substances, which are neither metals nor precious stones, are employed in magic Glass is supposed to be in its very nature "warm," and consequently it has the tendency to cause illness It is because of this that glass should not be used in the process of bleeding any person, so an animal's horn is used instead Glass beads should not be worn as they tend to shorten the wearer's life The recent widespread replacement of tea glasses by china tea cups is said to be for the sake of health

*Salt* also is much used in magic It is related that God loved Fatima so much that at the time of her wedding, in place of a dowry from Ali, God gave her salt In summoning the *peri*, "fairies," it is the medium by means of which the creature may communicate with the suppliant and salt crystals are widely used in charms worn by women who desire husbands, or by wives who want children They are used also to protect children from the evil eye

*Limestone*, whether in the form of a shell, or as a bit of the stone, is frequently used to produce a cure Lemon juice will be poured over a piece of this stone and it is then rubbed upon warts

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It is not uncommon to find stories of Ali's whereabouts in regions where there is no history of his travels

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion* p 169

<sup>3</sup> Cf chapter on Birth

<sup>4</sup> *Hilyatu l Mullakim*, p 8

<sup>5</sup> *Ajayibu l Makhulkat* in description of ahan, or iron

## CHAPTER XIX

### QUADRUPEDS AND BIRDS

THE Prophet was asked one day which was the best work for a man to follow. He replied that the four best occupations were raising grain, keeping sheep, herding cows and caring for date trees <sup>1</sup>

The religious literature of the Muhammadans in Iran is full of traditions which advise the keeping of animals in the house as a means of gaining merit. Consequently it is not unusual, among the middle and lower classes of the people, to see a sheep or a goat, or chickens, taken into the family living quarters. The Imam Muhammad Bakir<sup>2</sup> said that the angels will bless the man who keeps a sheep in the house twice every day, and will pray for him once. If he keeps two sheep they will pray for him twice. In such a case neither the animal nor the household will stand in need of any necessity, and worry will be far removed from them.

The same blessing is promised for keeping a milk giving cow, but cows can usually be kept in an adjoining room or stable without forfeiting the blessing. Moreover sheep and camels are regarded as angels which have come down from heaven, and it is a good thing to say one's prayers in the places where they are kept.

The Prophet regarded sheep raising as an extremely satisfactory and remunerative business. He said that if a sheep is lost or stolen, it is still a matter of good fortune for the owner just to have cared for it. On the other hand, if a cow is lost or stolen, or even eaten, it is gone and there is a loss. Even so Ali declared the cow to be the "sayid" of all the animals.

The owning of camels is not considered much of an asset. If they bring in money there is still a loss, because they are always on the road and are expensive to keep. The Prophet's advice was that if a person contemplated buying a camel he had best buy an ugly or a black one, because it would live longer than others, since the reddish coloured ones are said to be short lived.

Misfortune will come to anyone who passes between two camels tied together in a caravan, because they say that between each two animals there is a satan <sup>3</sup>

When dogs bark and donkeys bray it is a sign that devils are abroad, for dogs see and hear things which are denied to human senses, and at such times people should flee to God for protection. The howl of a dog is the sign of an earthquake, or pestilence, or the death of someone nearly related, for dogs are believed to be able to distinguish the Angel of Death.

Muhammadans regard dogs as unclean, and as a rule hunting dogs and sheep dogs are the only ones that are regarded as beneficial, although villagers who live in isolated places frequently keep dogs for protection. But if dogs are allowed in the house they should be kept in a room apart from where the family lives. On account of their 'bad breath' they should not be allowed near where people eat. But according to the Imam Tifār Sadik it is despicable (*makru*) to keep a dog in the house, and anyone who does so will have his store of merit diminished by the value of one pilgrimage <sup>4</sup>

Hunting dogs are better thought of. Nevertheless Ali relates that the Prophet said that game which is caught by a dog that is entirely black should not be eaten under any circumstance, and that such dogs should not only not be kept but they should not be allowed to live. If game is caught by a dog and the hunter arrives before it is dead, then it may be eaten. And if it is already dead, the flesh may be made good by saying "In the name of God." But it is absolutely forbidden to eat game which has been caught by a dog that was trained by a Christian, a Zoroastrian or a Jew.

There are stories now and then of men and women who have been transformed into the form of beasts <sup>5</sup>. Disobedient children are said to be so changed, and in addition to the stories in the books, even in everyday life there are rumours of human beings having been so transformed. In Meshed, in the month of mourning in 1935, it was reported over the city that a woman had been changed into a dog, because she had ridiculed some of the stories about the Imam Husain.

Often diseases are said to be cured by eating the flesh of particular animals, or by applying the parts of animal bodies to the affected members, or by burning animal excrement. Among the many practices that there are of this kind, the following will give an idea of the widespread faith in such

treatments night blindness may be cured by eating sheep's liver upon which the sun has shone, wounds are poulticed with the cooked spinal cord of a sheep, and sore eyes are bandaged in a poultice that is made of sheep's liver that is mixed with ass's dung and sweet peach seed, the combination being chopped up, mixed together, and then smoked. The fresh skin of a kid is often bound upon a wound. Ass's dung is mixed also with rock candy and seeds of the wild mustard to make a poultice for trachoma, and frequently a wound on a leg will be healed by the smoke of the burning dung of the ass but almost any wound may be poulticed with it when it is mixed with barley flour that has been moistened with the milk of a woman who has a girl baby. Hernia is treated with an application of *muhr i khar*, 'donkey's seal,' which is said by some to be a bone in the donkey's neck. Others say it is a gland in the throat. This is dried, powdered and mixed with the first dung of a white ass's colt and a turtle egg. This "donkey's seal" is claimed to be excellent treatment also for rheumatism when tied onto the stiff joint or the afflicted limb.

Sometimes in cases of severe fever, especially typhoid, a leg from the carcass of a donkey will be curled about the head of the patient. Also a child who licks or is tongue tied will be given donkey's milk to drink for such afflictions are said to be caused by children eating cheese when they are too small.

Poultices for abscesses are also made from cowdung and milk. Hemorrhoids are treated with suppositories made from the fat of a camel's hump, which is beaten fine and mixed with burnt peach seed and certain desert herbs. In fact if camel's meat is eaten it will cure hemorrhoids and many other complaints and often if the camel's wool is wrapped up and worn upon the body it will do as well. Burned camel's wool will stop nose bleeding. There are some people who believe that in order to increase their religious faith it is worth while or even necessary to eat camel's flesh from time to time.

Horse tallow is used to rub upon paralyzed limbs. The milk of a dog is diluted with water and poured over the head of a person who may be exposed to the machinations of witchcraft. To remove the spell of witchcraft, an old woman who was a diviner advised the burning of the dung of a white

dog, allowing the smoke to go into the house and all parts of the courtyard

Some wild animals also contribute to the healing of disease, the marrow from a deer's leg may be rubbed upon the weak legs of a child, to give it strength to walk or a wolf's knee cap may be tied to a child's weak legs for the same purpose a tiger's whisker, or even that of a black cat, if it is wrapped up with a salt crystal and a piece of onion skin and kept in the pocket, will give courage and strength, and so insomnia may be cured by eating the eye of a bat

The skin of a monkey will cure poison from plants, insects or animal bites

Black magic is sometimes performed with parts of animals There is a small triangular bone at the point of the sheep's shoulder blade which is called 'the doll' A woman whose husband has more than one wife will sometimes draw a face upon this bone, paint it and powder it and throw it into the house of her rival, to make her quarrel with the husband or wolf's fat, if rubbed upon a man's shirt will make him hate his wife This is resorted to by a mother in law or by a rival wife The bile of a wolf may maliciously be given to a woman to prevent pregnancy The liver of a beetle, or it may be a whole beetle, is put into food to cause people to hate each other A rival wife may try this

The liver of a monkey may be given to a person to make him love the giver, and if anyone wishes to be a remarkably good dancer, he should eat the ashes of a cremated monkey

Magical means are used to work upon animals as well as upon human beings A horse which eats the tail of a rabbit will become thin and fleet And when a horse becomes unruly, if verses 71-73 of the sura 'Ya Sin' are read into his ear, he will at once become quiet There is a saying when a person is advised and acts contrary to the advice, 'That is 'Ya Sin' spoken into the ear of an ass' A horse or donkey will be kept from all harm if its owner writes out the sura "Cattle" and binds it around his animal's neck

## BIRDS

*Roosters*—The rooster holds first place among all the feathered creatures that play a part in the superstitious thought and practice of Islam He is believed to possess

special senses, and there are several traits of the Prophet which are his, namely, generosity, bravery, zeal, and knowledge of the times of prayer, and in these very qualities a rooster with red wattles and a jagged comb excels all others

One of the angels is a "holy rooster" and resides under the throne of God, where he continually praises Him. When he says, *Ya har, ya Karyum*, "O thou Living, O thou Abiding," the roosters on earth hear him and begin to crow. His two wings reach from East to West and towards morning he flaps them, jumps about, and exclaims with a clear voice, "Praise be to God, praise be to the holy King!" At this signal the earthly roosters also clap their wings, jump about as he does and join him in exclaiming, "Praise be to God!"

The earthly rooster is said to possess five traits which he has no power to either decrease or increase, and which, since they are involuntary, bring him no merit. They are love of his wives, bravery, unwillingness to leave home, the habit of early rising and the ability to hear the call of the "holy rooster." The white rooster commands greater respect and consideration than others, because he is the friend and helper of the imams and of all the faithful. He is an angel and should not be killed, for his very presence is a protection. Satans cannot come into a house where a white rooster is kept, and even lions will flee from him. Should a person kill a white rooster he will see evil times.

These white roosters, and yellow hens and black hens, are used extensively by magicians in their works of magic. There are prayers that will be effective only if written in the blood of a yellow hen, while others require the blood of a black hen mixed with saffron. Insanity may be cured by tying to the patient a small glassy stone that is taken from the rooster's crop, or by burning the dried comb of a white or red rooster and allowing the patient to smell the smoke. At times the bile from a rooster may be rubbed on eyes to cure night blindness, or if it is mixed with the meat of a ewe it may be used to cure forgetfulness. If the blood of a rooster is put into an eye that has been blinded by the growth of white tissue, it will remove the tissue and restore the sight. If a drop of rooster blood that has been shed in a fight is put into food, it will cause those who eat of it to fight among themselves, and if the meat of a rooster is cooked and dried and made into pills with sumac they will cure diarrhoea. Also a low

fever which persists day after day may be cured by eating the meat of a rooster "that has been stolen" Some say that if the wing of a rooster is bound upon a patient who has fever his temperature will come down, but if it is bound to a person riding a horse, his horse will be able to go exceedingly fast<sup>6</sup>

Wounds are treated with a compress of the burned and powdered bones of a rooster's leg So also if a hen's head is tied about the neck of a sick child it will drive out whatever is causing the illness Or it may be that a small chick will be killed, and pounded out flat, and bound upon an ulcer on the leg

Eggs also are very commonly used in magic and in the treatment of disease Sorcerers are especially fond of choosing the eggs of hens that are of some one colour to remove the power of the evil eye Prayers are frequently written on eggs to cure toothache, headache or earache Egg compresses are bound upon the place where a needle has broken off in the flesh

The white of egg is often beaten up with a piece of silver money and rubbed on sore eyes, the silver is supposed to mix with the egg and make the remedy more potent The yolk of egg mixed with wheat flour and pigeon droppings, makes a good poultice for general use

A pullet's first egg should not be eaten but should be put into a sieve, and someone should whirl it around and say, 'May the number of your eggs be as many as there are holes in this sieve'

A rooster that crows at other than the regular times is called a rooster "out of season" The epithet is sometimes aptly employed for anyone who talks off the subject or who speaks at inopportune times A crowing hen is also observed if she crows on Mondays and Thursdays good fortune will visit that home, but if she crows on other days she must be given away or turned out

*Pigeons* —Pigeons, according to the Imam J'far Sadik, are "the birds of the prophets" they are therefore regarded as sacred and the shrines and the mosques are full of them It is considered to be a sin to kill them Some say that they are descended from Isma'il's pet pigeons which he loved very much and others say they are descended from Noah's pigeons for which he prayed The Imam Musa Ghasim said



that satans are dispersed by the least flutter of pigeons' wings, and Muhammad said that it is good to keep pigeons in the house with roosters, so the satans will associate with them and not harm the children of the household. And it is said that the members of the Prophet's family loved pigeons, and because of this love pigeons still pray to God for a blessing upon their keepers. Their cooing is said to be their repetition of one of the names of God, *Ya Hu*, "O He," and this is in itself a protection to the house. Some say that only a particular variety of pigeons say this and that they are known as the *Ya Hu* pigeons.

Another tradition relates that in the house of the Imam Sadik there was a pigeon that cooed a very great deal. The Imam asked his caller if he knew what the pigeon was saying. The friend replied that he did not, whereupon the Imam explained that it was praying God to bring a curse upon those who killed Husain, and he went on to say that it was good to keep such pigeons in one's house.<sup>7</sup>

Pigeons are said to sense the coming of an earthquake and will fly out of a building a few seconds before the shock.

*Crows*—It is a common saying that the crow lives for hundreds of years, and some say he lives forever. He is always awake at dawn, and this is what accounts for his longevity. It is thought, therefore, that if a person awakes at dawn and remains awake for an hour or two, his life will be lengthened like that of the crow, since the early morning hour is especially propitious to health. On the other hand, the reason dogs are short lived is because they are usually asleep at this time. But still another reason for the long life of the crow is that he drank the water of life.<sup>8</sup> And some say that when a crow's mate dies he never mates again.

If a crow caws early in the morning, then special news or a traveller from afar may be expected. To see one crow in the morning is a bad sign, but to see two is good. If a crow appears in front of a person who is about to start upon a journey, and if it caws, then it is a bad sign. He should not start until he has repeated the verse "I have confidence in you, O God, from evil which I find within me, and keep Thou me from it!"

It is said that crows were formerly garrulous women, and because of the trouble they made they were turned into crows and were put out into the fields.

*Owls* —The little owl that hoots at night from a roof or a wall is looked upon as an announcer of bad luck, the place where he sits will be ruined, or someone in the family will die, or some other dire misfortune will come to the owner of the house. The poet Sa'di mentions this in a couplet

O snake thou who dost strike whomever thou see'st  
Or owl thou who dost ruin wheresoever thou sittest

The owl, like the jackdaw, is said to have the evil eye, notwithstanding, if an owl seems to laugh, then happiness will come, whereas if he seems to mourn, then sorrow will follow. If the fresh blood of the owl is rubbed on a person with palsy it will cure him. But whenever one sees an owl he should say, "You are welcome there is a wedding here" in order to ward off any evil which it might foretell.

*Storks* —The stork is called Hadjı Lık Lak. Each "lık" is interpreted as the Arabic abbreviation for "to Thee," and so the saying that the Lak Lak says "To Thee praise, to Thee thanks." He is said to go to Mecca every year, hence the title Hadjı, and he is regarded as sacred. He knows when cholera threatens and flies away from the pestilence, leaving his nest and eggs.

A story that is attributed to Isfahani, who travelled about on foot, shows how jealous the storks are of the fidelity of their mates. A pair made their nest in a tree. A villager came and put some crow's eggs in the nest and removed the stork's eggs, and in due time a nestful of crows was hatched. When the male bird saw that the baby birds were not storks, he remonstrated with his mate and flew away. The next day he returned with four other storks who looked at the brood, conferred together, and flew away. A day or so later the mate returned with a great flock of storks and they pecked the poor female bird to death and went away.

*Hoopoes* —The hoopoe is considered to be very sacred indeed. He was Solomon's postman and carried a letter from him to Bilkis, the Queen of Sheba.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this letter the people of Sheba became Muslims and there is written on the hoopoe's wings "The best people are the sons of Muhammad." In magic the blood, eggs and wings of the hoopoe are much employed, and the claw, if put into food, has power to "bind the tongue." Even in the morning the hoopoe is a good omen.

*Nightingales* —When one is in love he should emulate the nightingale. He will not leave a garden where the Muhammad rose is in bloom on account of his great affection for it. This is the rose from which the attar of roses comes. It is said that the nightingale hatches seven young each year but only one becomes a nightingale, the other six become beetles.

*Parrots* —In learning and saying the Muslim prayers, one must have the character of the parrot. And if anyone eats the flesh of the parrot he will become fluent of speech.

Various fanciful stories of birds are well known among the common people. In ancient times, when a king was to be chosen, a *homa*, which was probably a falcon, was set loose by one of the ministers of the realm and allowed to fly around among the crowd and on whose soever shoulder it alighted, that one was to be the next king. And of the swallow it is said that before the time of Muhammad, in the "year of the Elephant" the year in which Muhammad was born an enemy came to destroy the holy place at Mecca. He came with elephants and his name was Abriha. Abu Talib assured the people that God would protect His house. Then swallows came in great numbers with stones in their bills and dropped them upon the enemy—and killed them all.<sup>10</sup> So the sacred swallow must not be killed.

Another bird that must not be killed is the sparrow hawk. This is because he led Adam to Mecca, for Adam is said to have walked to Mecca seventy times.

A bird called the *Si murgh*, "Thirty birds" is an imaginary bird concerning which there are many stories. It is believed to live a hundred years, to eat only once a year and never to light on the ground. Its home is in the Kaf mountain.

Also there are many superstitions about seeing birds under particular circumstances or at special times, for example, it is considered very bad to see a partridge in the morning—and no one would ever think of making a pet of one or of having it on the place. Pheasants are believed to gather together and cry out before an earthquake.

The sounds made by some of the more familiar birds have been interpreted religiously. The hen says, "God is on the throne." The cock cries, "Call upon God O neglectful one." The dove curses everyone who is opposed to Muhammad. The owl's voice is holy, and he says, "God is holy and worthy of my worship."

<sup>1</sup> *Hilyatu l Muttakin* p 136

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* p 128

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* p 136

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* p 130

<sup>5</sup> *Kıtab ı Manakıb al Murtadanı* by Formazı Kashafı p 285

<sup>6</sup> Cf chapter on birds in the *Ajayib al Makhlukat* by Kazvini

<sup>7</sup> *Hilyatu l Muttakin* p 138

<sup>8</sup> See chapter on the Kaf Mountain and Related Beliefs

<sup>9</sup> Koran Sura 27 The Ant

<sup>10</sup> *Ajayib al Makhlukat* p 108 Cf Koran Sura 105 The Elephant

## CHAPTER XX

### SNAKES SCORPIONS AND INSECTS

THERE are Muslim snakes and infidel snakes. The former are neither troublesome nor dangerous, one might even curl up on the chest of a sleeping child. They are easily recognized, because they stick out their tongues in friendly greeting when they meet human Muslims.

Every house is believed to have its snake, which is the real owner of the place. It never gives any trouble because it is a Muslim, though as a matter of fact some of them are believed to be furies. It is usually light in colour, or at least its belly is almost white, and it guards the house from infidel snakes, which are dangerous. There are some who say that this idea of the house snake goes back to the worship of Ahriman.

Although the educated will deny that there is any such idea held, yet many of the uneducated women firmly believe that there is a snake in every grave, and they think it will torment the dead according to the number of sins committed in life. This idea has arisen from the tradition that on the night in which Muhammad made his heavenly journey, while he was on his way he saw a huge snake in hell. Gabriel, who was accompanying him, told him that what he saw was the first and less severe hell, the place where bad Muslims would go. Muhammad was overcome and cried bitterly to think of any of his people going to such a place, and asked Gabriel, therefore, why it was that God had created such a snake. He was informed that it was for the punishment of four classes of Muslims: those who had performed all the prostrations of the Muslim prayers but once, those who had been displeasing to their parents for even one hour, those who had taken one *dinar* unjustly from others, and those who had uttered even but a single word of slander.

Belief in this huge snake is elaborated extravagantly. In its belly are 70,000 cities, each of which has 70,000 houses, and each house has 70,000 rooms. In each of these rooms are 70,000 boxes, each containing 70,000 measures of serpent.

poison, which is so concentrated that if one drop should be spilled on one of the mountains of the earth every living thing would be killed. Viper poison is regarded as so terribly deadly that if a viper should bite a baby camel while it was sucking its mother, shortly after the baby died the mother would also succumb from the effect of the poison that passed from the mouth of the sucking offspring into the udder and on quickly into her system. However, the leaves of the olive may be used to counteract the effects of a snake's poison.<sup>1</sup>

Dangerous snakes should be killed, but a house snake never. The killing of a dangerous snake gives the same merit as the killing of a Christian or a Jew, or at least this is what Abdulla ibn Abbas, an uncle of the Prophet, is reported to have said.<sup>2</sup>

The eating of snake's flesh is forbidden by Muslim law but it is eaten by some of the people. This is to gain great strength of the back, or with the idea of becoming immune to snake bite. A dervish who was reputed to have eaten many snakes said that actually he had not eaten the flesh, but after cooking it for hours he ate only the soup. But when the flesh is eaten the reptile must be killed according to special rules: a span from each end of the snake should be cut off at one and the same time, in order to do this a heavy plank is put upon the body, so that the head and tail each protrude and at the same instant both the head and the tail are then cut off and no poison enters the body.

Kazwini says that for toothache and hemorrhoids, both the blood and the flesh of snakes should be rubbed upon the place affected. A leper may be cured of his disease by eating the cooked flesh of the snake, when one snake scale is eaten, sore eyes will be warded off for a year, and if two are eaten they will serve for two years, and so on. Also burned snake skin may be rubbed on sore eyes to cure them, and it will serve, by the way, to turn green or hazel eyes black. If a paste is made of the ashes of burned snake's flesh and used for blackening the eyebrows it will cure tuberculosis. The Iranians say that the ancient physician Galen claimed that the eyesight could be greatly strengthened by eating snake soup. A snake scale put on a pregnant woman will insure easy delivery.

On no condition should anyone open his mouth before a snake, for if it should get opportunity to count his

teeth he will surely die This same thing is said about a centipede

Persian literature contains many accounts of dragons<sup>3</sup> Ravines in mountain districts that are difficult to reach are frequently said to harbour them Peasants in mountain villages will tell stories of hidden treasure high up on some cliff, treasure which was left by some ancient king in an old palace that is still guarded by a dragon The body of the dragon is said to be hot, and it can live either in the water or on the desert, as well as on the mountain tops When automobiles first came to Iran, the story was told that an old villager saw one at night In his certainty that he was seeing a dragon he died of fright It is a dragon, according to popular belief, that causes eclipses, by trying to swallow the moon or the sun People pray very loudly at such times, and beat upon brass or copper utensils especially heirlooms, to drive him away

The first two verses of the seventh sura in the Koran, together with the first verse of the fourteenth sura may be written upon a white stone and put into a niche in the wall to keep away snakes and scorpions Or the first four verses of the sixth sura may at times be written on a reflecting surface and washed with rain water and this water will be poured into the four corners of a house to cause snakes mice and other injurious animals to leave Also if verses 101 102 of this same sura are written upon pieces of broken pottery, and if pictures of undesired animals such as snakes, mice, and scorpions are drawn upon these pieces those animals will not come near

There are some people who are very particular to always have a piece of snake skin, or the fangs of a snake somewhere about them to ward off the evil eye

*Scorpions*—Scorpions are much feared by most people They refrain from mentioning them by name at night, for fear it will cause them to approach If a scorpion should be killed, and especially at night, one should call out, 'Your mate is in Baghdad!' or "Your mate is with its mate!" because it is believed that the mate comes immediately to avenge the other's death and such a statement may deceive it and send it away in search of its mate

There is a so called prayer which is made up of words which are neither Arabic nor Persian After it is repeated the

person who has used it will clap his hands and blow his breath into the air. When the scorpion hears the clapping he is supposed to become paralyzed and to be unable to move until morning. And at times this incantation is employed

I ve bound him I ve bound him  
His sting and his tail have I fastened together  
No more will he fly in the sky  
No more will he jump on earth  
By Solomon the prophet I swear

The Imam Bakir said that this prayer would protect from scorpions and all stinging and biting creatures. In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate and in the name of Muhammad His Messenger I flee to the power of God from all evil which comes in the night and in the day I know my God is in the straight way."

Another means of protection from scorpions is to look at one of the dimmer stars in the Little Bear and repeat the following three times. O God make me healthy and let me pray for Muhammad and his household. Make haste to protect us from the evil of all evil things.

Scorpions should be killed not only because they are injurious but also because at one time when the Prophet was picking up a stone a scorpion stung him.

There are said to be scorpions in the graves for the purpose of tormenting sinners.

*Spiders*—Little spiders are regarded as satans. If a spider crawls in front of a person that person will become rich. Fever may be cured by concealing a black spider in the clothing of a patient. Fresh circumcision, and laceration that is due to childbirth may each be successfully treated with oil of sesame in which either a spider or a scorpion has been soaked.

If a tarantula stings a person and then is killed, its mate has a strange way of taking vengeance. It is believed that it will crawl above the door that leads out of the house and wait there until the corpse of the bitten person is brought out, so that he may throw himself down upon it.

*Insects*—The louse is the most outstanding insect in Iran. It has even been said, and that of course by Muhammadans themselves, that a person who does not have lice is not a good Muhammadan.<sup>4</sup> Someone has said that in Islam lice alone of all animals, are considered important and worthy of honour.



On the feast of sacrifice in Mecca, the pilgrims must cut off the head of a sheep in sacrifice to God for every louse they kill And if a man eats a louse he will most likely be turned into a monkey One tradition speaks of a person who was so transformed for killing a louse that had been on the Prophet In fact it is said that monkeys were at first human beings who ventured to kill a louse one time under a table, when bread was being made, and in punishment for this they were changed

*Fleas* also are numerous and people are much troubled by them But the olcander is said to keep them away

*Flies* —When there are very many flies and many sparrows there will be very little sickness At least so it is said

*Bed bugs* —To rid a place of this pest, each one that is caught should be burned, and then the companions will flee in fright

*Ticks* —The bite of certain ticks produces severe fever To become immune a person should eat one of them, and thereafter the bites of this kind of tick need not be feared There is a cow tick that is often killed and put onto the roof of the mouth of a tiny baby, so that when he grows up his glance may have the power to cause ticks to fall off cows !

*Ants* —There is a sura in the Koran that is named for the ant (Sura 27) One of the large ants that are common in Iran is sometimes used in treating sore eyes First it is allowed to scratch the inside of the eyelid until it bleeds, then a poultice that is made of tumeric, flour and oil is bound upon the eye A cure is certain

*Grasshoppers* may be used as food, but they must be caught by the hands of Muslims, and it is a sin to eat the small ones that have not yet flown None of them should be tormented

*Mice* are among the little animals that must be killed, because it was a mouse that stole the wick of the Prophet's candle and carried it under the place where Muhammad was praying There it took fire and the Prophet was very angry Also it was a mouse that drank some of the Prophet's attar of violets It even put its tail into the bottle and spilt some of the liquid, and then it mischievously carried stones and put them into the bottle so that it would appear to contain the original amount This is like the statement that all but the friendly Muslim snakes must be killed, because one crawled

into the Prophet's shoe and a bird of prey took the shoe and carried it off

*Swifts* should be killed because they are known to have been friends of Uthman. And now when a Shi'ite Muslim curses Uthman, the swift will say, "I curse Ali"

*Bees* —Among the other little creatures that should not be killed is the honey bee. This is because it was the honey bee that brought water to Abraham when he was thrown into the fire.<sup>5</sup> All other bees than the honey bee, however, are to go to hell, and the large red bee, which is really a wasp, is described as an infidel and should therefore be put to death. *Ants* also should not be killed, because when there was a famine during the time of Solomon, he went to the desert and there he saw the ants praying to God and asking Him not to punish them. The *bat* should be spared because it is continually reading the first sura of the Koran. And the *frog* should not be killed because it was he who took water to Abraham, and he burned his own skin in so doing. Then God told him to go to the water and live. If anyone should kill a frog his hands will lose their "salt" or skill, and whatever good he may do for others will prove to be futile.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kazwini *Ajayib al Makhhlukat* p 547

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* p 546 ff

<sup>3</sup> *Manakib al Murtadani* p 333

<sup>4</sup> *Narangistan* p 84

<sup>5</sup> Koran Sura 21 68

## CHAPTER XXI

### DREAMS AND SLEEP

THE ancient Zoroastrians claimed to possess knowledge of dreams and they frequently interpreted them as foretelling future events. And many Iranians of today believe that they have peculiar powers to understand dreams because their ancients learned the science from Daniel. According to Muhammadan tradition, Ali said that the knowledge of dreams and the ability to interpret them, and to predict the future, resided "in him and in his family"<sup>1</sup> With all this in their background, it is not surprising that Iranians attach great importance to dreams. There is much to be found in their religious literature about dream interpretations. Majlisi recounts at some length the opinions of different ones of the Imams. Ali said that whenever a believer goes to sleep his soul is taken close to the throne of God, so that whatever dream he 'sees' is true. Again, when he was replying to the question as to the reason why some dreams come true and others do not, he said that God has placed a ruler *ie* life, over every spirit which he created. When a person sleeps the spirit goes away, but the ruler remains in the body. While the spirit is away it may meet angels and it may meet jinn, so that whatever dreams come true are of the angels and those that do not are of the jinn. The Imam Ja'far Sadik said that because the faithful live clean lives and the foundation of their faith is true, when their spirits leave their bodies they associate only with angels, and therefore all their dreams come true and are the same as visions.

Tradition tells us also that no one after the Prophet Muhammad received *ilham*,<sup>2</sup> or individual revelation, but that dreams have been given in place of it. Therefore dreams are said to be one of the seventy parts of prophecy.

The times when dreams are 'seen' are significant. Those which come in the first part of the night do not come true, but those which come in the last third of the night are invariably realized. These last are like the descending of angels, unless

of course the dreamer has failed to say the required prayers or has not purified himself. The dreams that are seen at the time of the vernal equinox have more meaning and come to pass more quickly, than those seen at any other time of the year.

Some dreams are supposed to mean the very opposite of what they seem, those that are sad will turn out to be happy experiences, and those that are happy will be sad if one sees a corpse, for example, he will witness a person full of health and strength. A body that is seen covered with sores will mean a beautiful or handsome person, if one dreams of bloodshed, he will have some pleasant experience and if one witnesses a wedding in a dream, he will meet with some unhappiness. Such contrary dreams as these are said to be "women's dreams."

To dream of reading the Koran is good. If a prophet or an Imam is seen in a dream and he appears to be happy, all will be well but if he appears cross or irritated that means trouble. If a light is seen in a dream the dream is God given and the dreamer will be prosperous in religion and in his daily work. Moreover, the inhabitants of the locality where the dream came will enjoy justice and righteousness.

The Imam Ja'far Sadik said that there are three kinds of dreams: happy ones which God gives to the faithful; those which cause fear; and those which disturb the mind and cause unhappiness. Bad dreams, he said, are caused by a huge devil who at night fills the whole earth with his body. If a person has a bad dream he should turn over in bed, spit out the saliva from his mouth, get his Koran and read the last sura and the sura "Kursi." He should then repeat this prayer: "May good come to me and may this evil go to my enemies." After this he should rise, repeat the prayer that is appointed for that time in the night and give something in alms. If all this is done God will not allow any evil effects of the dream to remain with him.

Bad dreams have given rise to beliefs in many strange creatures. The dreams of the sick are different from those of the healthy, and no doubt some of the monstrous creatures like the witch *Al*, described in the chapter on "Birth" have had their origin in times of sickness. *Bakhtak* is a creature of horrible shape who throws herself upon the dreamer and tries to suffocate him, he becomes like lead and sweats

profusely, but if he can say *B'ism i lla*, she will go away. She is said to be a ghou! Some say she is the same as *Binn Gih*, or she of the "mud nose". This creature is said to know where treasure is hidden. She also frequently appears to people in their dreams, and if she can be caught she will reveal where the treasure is. It is related that once she came to Alexander the Great in a dream. He caught her by the nose, cut it off and then gave her a mud nose. Ever since that time, if when she appears one reaches for her nose, she flees at once because she does not want it broken.

Bad dreams frequently cause people to change their plans for work, or in regard to going on a journey.

By the use of specified verses from the Koran, dreams with a purpose may be induced. For example, if one is interested in the numerous stories of hidden treasure and wishes to locate some particular treasure, he may write Sura 4 14 15 upon a piece of deer skin or wolf skin, wash it in water, repeat a prayer over the water, and then sprinkle this water about the place where the treasure is said to be concealed. He may then expect to be shown in a dream its exact location.

If a person writes Sura 6 59 63 upon a linen garment and places this garment under his pillow, he will be given a dream in which he will be informed of all the directions necessary for carrying out the plan of work he has in mind. Or if he binds these verses upon his arm before going to sleep, he will see some person in his dream who will show him and teach him marvellous things.

Many of the ordinary dreams, which come apparently as an effect of one's work or thoughts during his waking hours, are given special meaning. To dream of going to the bath means that he will go on a pilgrimage, to dream of kissing brings freedom to the captive, to dream of climbing a mountain means success in work, to dream of a snake means the dreamer will be wealthy, to dream of a cow and her calf means he will meet an enemy, to dream of the moon means good news will come, and if a pregnant woman dreams of a sword, her child will be a boy, but if she dreams of pearls, it will be a girl.

But if a man lies about what he has or has not seen in a dream, he will be known as a liar by the snarls in his hair and his beard.

There are many books that treat of the meaning and

interpretation of dreams and that give lengthy explanations. Ordinarily only the priests and the educated classes know much about them, but the illiterate people have also their own interpretations, as well as those which they hear read or related. To these they attach great importance.

Of the books, some of the best known and most widely read are these *Rawdat al Shuhada* by Kash fī, *Hilyatu'l Muttakin* by Majlisī, *Mirat al Khāl* by Amīr Shīr Alī Ludī, *Jam' al Dawat*, which is a symposium printed in Teheran as recently as 1933, and the *Majma' al Dawat* by Muhammad ibn Kiyās al Dīn.

The last book mentioned gives the rules for sleeping: a person must sleep in a clean place, must wear clean clothing and his heart must be clean, and he must sleep on the right side. A teacher of the present day said, however, that with the greater knowledge of science it is now known that it is better to lie on the left side during the first part of the night, so that the food may be well digested, and then to turn onto the right side, for the sleep of believers should be on that side. Doctors should sleep on the left side and devils on the face! It is said that the Prophet slept on neither the right nor the left side, but always on his back, as becomes a prophet.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada* p. 157

<sup>2</sup> *Hilyatu'l Muttakin* p. 65

<sup>3</sup> *Ilham* or individual revelation cannot be gained by meditation or deduction, but is suddenly communicated while the recipient cannot tell how, whence, or why. (cf. Professor D. B. Macdonald in his article on *Ilham* in the *Encyclopædia of Islam*)

## CHAPTER XXII

### WEEPING EXPECTORATING, BREATHING AND SNEEZING

FORMERLY there were to be seen numerous tear-bottles, with long crooked necks and an opening like that of an eye bath, which were used to catch the tears which were shed for the martyred Husain who was slain upon the field of Kerbala. In the religious literature there are important promises for those who weep for Husain, which include those also who deliberately try or pretend to weep. They will not be detained on the Judgment Day but will go straight into heaven, for anyone who has "bottled tears" to produce will pass in readily on this unquestionable evidence.

When one makes a pilgrimage to the tomb of Husain, after he has cleansed himself in preparation according to the elaborate directions, he proceeds to read the guide book for pilgrims. If in reading this he is brought to tears and his eyes show that he has wept, it is to be understood as a sign that Husain has given him permission to approach his tomb,<sup>1</sup> for Husain's spirit is said to look favourably upon anyone who weeps for him.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is said to have wept blood at Husain's death.<sup>3</sup>

Usually, at religious gatherings, women make great effort "to shed a tear," and their facial contortions are sometimes most amusing, but they think there is merit to be gained. And if one weeps because the Twelfth Imam, the Master of the Times, is still delaying his coming, she gains still more merit.<sup>4</sup> But the reward for weeping for Muhammad is that the mourner will be saved from hell.

### EXPECTORATING

Every here and there in the religious books there are stories to indicate that the saliva of the Prophet was held to possess miraculous power. It is related in the traditions that when Ali, the nephew and son in law of Muhammad, was born, he took him out of his crib and carried him to the corner of the

room, and there he put his tongue into the child's mouth. The infant at once began to suck it <sup>5</sup> and by this act he acquired Muhammad's understanding and became the "door to the house of knowledge" <sup>6</sup>. After that he did not need the nourishment of his mother's milk, because he had drunk from the very source of life!

Another tradition concerns the marriage of the Prophet's daughter Fatima to her cousin Ali. The night on which the bride was taken to her husband's house Muhammad spat into a water bottle containing water, said a prayer and told Ali to drink of it and to perform his ablutions with it and then he told Fatima to do the same. The writer of the account says that it is related elsewhere that Muhammad then sprinkled some of the water on Fatima's head and between her breasts and said, "O God, I give these to thee, and also her children. Keep them from the evils of demons and Satan." Then he sprinkled some of the water on Ali's head and shoulders and prayed the same prayer. Finally he prayed thus: "O God, these two are mine and I am theirs. Just as thou hast taken uncleanness from me, so make clean both of these." Then he told them to rise and go to their sleeping place. The Shi'ites say that this is why the Imams are "sinless" as God desired them to be <sup>8</sup>. Also when Fatima's son Hasan was born, Muhammad put his mouth to Hasan's mouth so the child would get some of the powerful saliva <sup>9</sup>.

Muhammad's thirty fourth miracle was performed with saliva. Gabriel came to him and reported that all of those of the fourth heaven, who were jinn and relatives of Iblis (the Devil), had engaged in a long conversation with man, and that it was likely to end in a quarrel. He told Muhammad he had better send someone to them to make peace. After some discussion the angel suggested Ali, and Muhammad agreed. He had him brought before him, spat some of his "blessed saliva" upon him, <sup>10</sup> and sent him off on his hazardous errand.

The Prophet's fortieth miracle was similar. He spat upon Ali's eyes on the day of Khaibar, <sup>11</sup> when he was standard bearer for Muhammad, and once when he was in Medina the water in a well became bitter so he spat into it and it became sweet. Another time he was sleeping in a tent in the desert, and when he awoke he called for water with which to wash his hands and mouth <sup>12</sup>. The water from his mouth



fell on the ground, and the next morning a large tree, full of leaves and fruit, stood upon that spot. The fruit of this tree gave blessing to all who ate of it, and its leaves were for healing. But when Muhammad died it dropped its fruit, and its leaves became dry, and when Ali was killed it was found full of thorns and the fruit lay on the ground. After this it brought forth no more fruit, but its leaves were still used for healing the sick. Then one day they saw that pure blood was dripping from its trunk and that again the leaves were withered—and soon the news came of the killing of Husain at Kerbala.

It is a common saying that there are 1,000 secrets for using saliva in working magic, and for removing the spell of the evil eye. It is also believed to be good to apply to the bites of animals and to the stings of insects, and it is well to use it on most sores. If an animal has a wound, the affected place should be struck seven times on Friday morning, and the sore should be spat upon after each stroke. It will heal.

It is noteworthy that the saliva of Saiyids, the descendants of the Prophet, is believed to possess peculiar healing power. Likewise that of a priest, or other holy person who has been to Mecca will cure the oriental boil known as the Baghdad boil, and which lasts a year. The priest draws a circle around the boil then he spits on it and says a prayer. A cure is certain.

But it is said that the saliva of an old woman is nitric acid.

### BREATHING

The performing of magic by blowing is almost always connected with the reading or reciting of verses from the Koran. The very repeating of the words makes the breath holy, and therefore it has power. The "Throne Verse" (2:256), which follows, is perhaps used more than any other in this rite.

"God! There is no God but He, the Living, the Eternal, nor slumber seizeth Him, nor sleep, His, what soever is in the Heavens and whatsoever is in the Earth! Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His own permission? He knoweth what hath been before them and what shall be after them, yet nought of His knowledge

shall they grasp, save what He willeth His Throne reacheth over the Heavens and the Earth, and the upholding of both burdeneth Him not, and He is the High, the Great !”

A familiar story is that of a man who feared that thieves might enter his house if he left it Before going out he repeated the Throne Verse, then blew his breath about the place and went away When he returned there were thrones piled up in his courtyard which reached to the sky, and his house and belongings were safe !

For protection from calamity, pestilence and all machinations of enemies, one should read Suras 109, 112, 113, and 114, and he should blow twice toward each of the four points of the compass, once toward the sky and once toward the ground Then he should recite or read the Throne Verse and repeat again the four suras above After this he should blow about in a circle, and this circle becomes an invisible fortress against any and every evil

When saying goodbye to one who is starting on a journey, many people repeat a verse of the Koran and then blow in a circle about the head of the person This will protect him from accident and trouble on the road

Blowing may be used to effect cures In case of headache the Throne Verse is read seven times in the presence of the sufferer, and after each reading the breath is blown on the aching head, and the pain will be removed or relieved If this verse is read seven times in the presence of a fever patient, and the reader blows upon the patient after each reading, the fever is sure to leave, or if the one who is sick will but eat the paper upon which this verse has been written, the blowing may be performed with the same beneficial result

For treatment of paralysis, rheumatism or lumbago, the first sura is written on a clean, well polished dish At that time it is read seventy times and then it is blown upon The dish must then be rubbed upon the affected part and a sure cure is the result Furthermore, if the sixth sura is read seven times in the morning, and the reader blows upon his body after each reading, he will be cured of any illness from which he may be suffering To heal a broken bone, the second half of the seventy eighth verse of the thirty sixth sura is read, “ Who,” saith he, “ shall give

life to bones when they are rotten ?” The breath is then blown upon the place where the bone is broken and it will heal

If anyone has a dangerous enemy, he should gather a bit of dust from a crossroads, read over it the sixth sura seven times, breathe upon it and throw it in the direction of his enemy, so that he will be troubled no more

For general welfare, if a person reads the eighth sura ten times after his morning prayer and before he speaks, then blows upon the palms of his hands and rubs his entire body he will be safe from all misfortunes that day

To remove doubts, temptations and mental distractions, verses 15-17 of the third sura should be read over a dish of sugar, the sugar is blown upon, and then melted in dew which has been collected from the leaves of trees For four days one half teaspoonful of this is taken as medicine along with figs, which should be the total diet for the time The mind will be set free and all tasks will be made easy

But the power of the first sura is so great that if a corpse is blown upon seventy times, and this sura is said over it from seven to seventy times, and the corpse is blown upon again, and it becomes alive, one should not be surprised !

Blowing alone is sometimes used For example, if in childbirth the placenta does not come easily the woman should blow into a bottle to facilitate its coming <sup>13</sup>

### SNEEZING

Many people believe that a sneeze indicates that a jinn has entered the body, and so they repeat the “Throne Verse” to drive him out Usually the sneeze is regarded as a bad sign If a carriage driver has ill luck on the road, a broken spring or a sick animal, he tries to recall whether or not he had sneezed while harnessing his team Or if a chauffeur has engine trouble, he will declare that it is all because some one of the passengers sneezed before starting

In any event, when a person sneezes he should pause in whatever he is doing Should he sneeze a second time, however, he may go on with his work Sometimes a Westerner will note the look of consternation that there is on the faces of those around him when he has sneezed and will feign a second sneeze to calm their fears But one sneeze at night

is not considered to be bad. And besides, if the first sura is read or repeated after a single sneeze all danger will be removed. Then by blowing on the hands after the reading, and rubbing them over the face, headache, eye pain, nose bleed, and rash of the face will be cured. Ali declared that when one says "Praise be to God" after a sneeze he will not suffer with toothache nor pains in his muscles. And it is related that the Prophet said that it is beneficial to health to sneeze once, twice, or thrice, but more than that indicates physical weakness or actual illness.

Whoever sneezes on the twenty third day of Ramadan is certain to live another year. Observe that when a Muslim sneezes, any other Muslim nearby should say, 'God be merciful to you,' and the one who sneezed should reply 'God lead you and make your work prosperous.' This is supposed to remove any evil effects of the sneeze. Whenever a person hears a sneeze from a distance, he should say, "Praise be to God," for by so doing he helps counteract the evil omen and at the same time he remembers God, and by so doing he obtains a double blessing. The traditions have multiplied indefinitely these stories about sneezing. The *Usul al Kafi*, which is an extensive work in Arabic by al Kulini, devotes an entire chapter to this subject.

### YAWNING AND HICCOUGHING

The Prophet said that to yawn was evil and that whenever a person yawned the devil laughed. Yawning during prayers is very bad, for there are two words which should not be uttered during prayer, *ha* and *ya* because they make the prayer of no effect. A yawn is either *ha* or *ya* and is therefore forbidden. Hacking or clearing the throat is also disapproved.

A person should not yawn in front of another person, for this will bring him misfortune, but if he has done so, the person mistreated should step behind the one who has yawned, and strike him on the back and look to heaven. This will remove the evil effects of the yawn.

Hiccoughing is a sign that one's name is being connected with some damaging gossip, and until the name has been cleared from all connection with the matter the hiccoughs will continue.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Miftah al Jinan*, by Mirza Rahmatulla lith Teheran, 1920,  
p 346
- <sup>2</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada* p 225
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid* , p 63
- <sup>4</sup> Majlisi, *Zad al Ma ad*, ch x
- <sup>5</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada*, p 90
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid* , p 94
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid* p 79
- <sup>8</sup> Cf Sura 33 33 end, and Rodwell s note 4
- <sup>9</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada* p 108
- <sup>10</sup> *Khulasat al Akhbar*, by Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi, p 29
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid* p 29
- <sup>12</sup> *Rawdat al Shuhada*, p 225
- <sup>13</sup> All of these references to the Koran have been derived from  
the margins of the specially prepared Koran

## CHAPTER XXIII

### NAILS HAIR AND TEETH

THERE is a story which is believed by many that before his fall Adam possessed a body which was covered with a shell that was made of material like that of his nails, but after his disobedience<sup>1</sup> this shell was changed into soft flesh, all except at the ends of his fingers and toes. And it is commonly believed that the nail parings do not decay but persist, and that in far distant times they will again be put to use.

While it can scarcely be said that there is a belief that the nails have spirits, yet they do have life, and consequently great care is given them. The parings should be buried, or at least hidden, so that no enemy or sorcerer can get them, to scratch out the owner's eyes or work other evil with them. And as this advice is said to come from the Imams, the great majority of the people follow it. Many put their nail parings under the door sill and say, "May sorrow go and joy come, may trouble go and food come!"

Then on the day when al Dajjal comes, the nails which were buried under the threshold will grow into thorns and stick into the feet and clothing of the people, when they rush out into the street to see this wondrous creature. Thus they will be compelled to stop and pick out the painful and offending things, and al Dajjal will pass on. Since those who had buried their nails were the believers, as will be evident, they will be saved from hell, because all of those who follow al Dajjal, like those who followed the Pied Piper, will be led to destruction.

Parings of the toe nails are often buried near the door of one's house, so that on the Day of Judgment they will be present to give witness that the owner has made pilgrimages. For the same reason they are sometimes buried at the entrance to a shrine, where they are an unquestioned proof that the pilgrimage has been made.

Sometimes people are sensitive about these beliefs and give absurd excuses to justify their actions. A woman was asked

why she was collecting her nail parings so carefully, and she replied that she did not want them littering up the yard. But she was disregarding the rags and bones and melon rinds and fragments of old shoes which were scattered about at the time.

Long finger-nails should be avoided, since they furnish places of retreat for satans, and particular times for paring the nails are recognized. Thursday is a good day because he who cuts his nails on Thursday will never have sore eyes. Friday is also a good day, and if one desires the merit of doing this act on both days, he may leave one finger until Friday. If the nails grow rapidly and become too long from one Thursday to another, he may cut them on Monday. A man who did not adhere to these beliefs was cutting his nails on Wednesday, and his wife was alarmed at the prospect of some misfortune coming to them as the result of his carelessness and implored him to cut his nails only on Fridays and Mondays.

The order in which the nails should be trimmed is also specified. One should begin with the little finger of the left hand and end with the little finger of the right. If he *must* cut his nails on Wednesday, he may do so in safety by reversing the order.<sup>13</sup>

### HAIR

Hair combings, like nail parings, should be buried, they should not be burned or the owner will suffer from dizziness, neither should they be thrown upon the ground, or someone might step on them or a crow might carry them away, and in either case the owner would suffer with headache. During the centuries that the Iranian women have veiled their faces, the idea was prevalent that a man must not see a woman's hair combings, for it would be like showing the face and therefore a cause of shame. In this connection it was said that if a man saw one hair of a woman who was not his mother, wife, sister or daughter, that woman would hang by that hair in hell for thirty years.<sup>1</sup> This idea caused many devout Muslim women in Iran a great deal of distress during the period of the recent compulsory unveiling. But no doubt many of the old ideas that were necessarily connected with wearing the veil will now be given up, and the importance which has hitherto been attached to them will be forgotten.

The most common way of disposing of hair-combings was

to hide them. Cracks in mud walls furnished many hiding places, and some women threw their combings into the toilet, for this had two advantages: the hair was hidden and it was believed that the hair would grow better if this disposition was made. However, if a woman had been to a mosque or a shrine, she must not put her combings in any unworthy place, because now her whole person had become sacred and it would be a sin to throw a holy thing into an unclean place.

A good head of hair is desired by most women, and many Iranian women certainly do have beautiful hair. The custom of braiding it into many tiny braids has led them to be proud of the number of these braids they can boast. This custom too has all but passed away with the adoption of the hat, and most of the women have had their hair cut. But unhappily there were some who were victims of favus, and for them the former cloth or lace head kerchief afforded welcome protection. Their heads had been neglected in childhood and in wearing hats they were sure to be chagrined. One of the most cutting remarks that can be made of a young woman, especially if she is being considered as a bride for some acquaintance, is to say that probably she has had favus. Since there is this attitude one wonders why the disease has been so prevalent, but it appears to have been largely due to widespread carelessness on the part of mothers.

Should a child be frail or be suffering from an acute attack of illness, the mother will make a vow not to cut his hair for a certain period,<sup>4</sup> or a man who has become weakened through illness or vice will pluck a hair from his head and throw it into the holy place of the Shrine of the Imam Ridā in order to regain his strength.

It is related that Ali Akbar, the son of the Imam Husain, wore a scalp lock, consequently many little boys in Iran, especially in the villages, have been accustomed to wear these scalp locks in his memory. This they do for merit.

These tonsorial customs have been changing with the changes in dress, and no doubt it is a matter of only a short time until they will be entirely discontinued and the beliefs that went with them will be discarded. This is sure to happen, even though some of them were advised by the Prophet and the Imams. The beard of the devout Muslim should be of the prescribed length, i. e. when the chin is grasped with the hand, the beard should not extend below the flexed



hand A long beard signifies a lack of intelligence, and some times an old man with a long beard is taunted, as was an old villager who wore a long white beard A sojourner on the road saw him and called out, "Grandfather, don't you know the price of wool has dropped ? Why such a beard ?"

The beard like the nails should be trimmed on appointed days and the trimmings should be buried

Another custom among the men which does not harmonize with the western hat is that of wearing the hair long over the ears Among villagers these locks were formerly a cause of pride, and they were carefully curled up over the edges of their brimless hats They were to serve a useful purpose on the Bridge of Sirat,<sup>5</sup> for if the believer should totter as he passed over this narrow bridge then the Imams could easily get hold of him by these locks and rescue him from falling into the abyss

In the familiar book, *Jam' al Dawat*, there is written just what will happen when the hair is cut on each of the thirty days of the month For example, if it is cut on the twentieth, the person will be immune if pestilence should come, if it is cut on the eighth, then there will be widespread sickness And so it goes

If anyone is able to get some of the hair from the head of a *div*, jinn or peri, and if he burns it, the owner of the hair will appear and offer his help in any work for which he may be needed

Henna is bound upon the hair and the beard, and the nails also are coloured with it There is merit in its use, and often the hands and the feet are dyed with it, and sometimes it is rubbed on the entire body According to the advice of the Prophet there are four things a believer should do use perfume, take a wife, clean his teeth and "bind henna" The merit obtained from one *dirham* that is spent for henna is greater than that of a thousand spent for charity !

The benefits that come from the use of henna are many it drives out through the ears any swellings or shifting pains, if the sight has become dim it restores it to its former strength, it keeps the membranes of the nose soft, it imparts a sweet odour to the mouth, it gives strength to the roots of the teeth, it removes body odour, it lessens the power of the temptations of Satan, it makes the angels glad, it causes believers to rejoice, it makes the infidels rage, it is an ornament

to the user and becomes a sweet fragrance, it diminishes the trials in the grave, and because of it Nakir and Munkir will not ply their questions

Collyrium is widely used upon the eyelashes. There is abundant advice to be found in the traditions from the Prophet and the Imams to justify the custom. People believe that many benefits result from its use: that it makes the lashes grow, cures red watery eyes, adds keenness to the sight, and makes the breath sweet. The eyebrows are blackened also, and oftentimes they are extended until they almost meet above the nose. This also is meritorious.

### TEETH

Teeth, like the nails, are believed to persist, and the Imams have advised burying them along with the nails and the hair. An old woman who had a tooth pulled in the dispensary asked for it so that she could take it to the graveyard and bury it. "On the day of Resurrection," she said, "it will rise with me and I will not be left toothless."

Frequently extracted teeth will be wrapped in cotton and put into a hole in the wall, so that the sorcerers cannot get them and work magic against their owner. And it is said that if a mouse eats a child's first tooth, that child will become exceptionally brilliant.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> According to a widely accepted tradition it was a grain of wheat that caused the loss of Paradise though in the Koran it would appear to have been something that was the fruit of a tree (7: 18 and 2: 34)

<sup>2</sup> In the common speech of the people al Dajjal is the name of the ass that is to be ridden by the Antichrist. The stiff vibrant hairs of the body of this ass will give forth music so that people will rush out to see it.

<sup>3</sup> An example of the advice of the Imams in confirmation of these customs may be found in the *Hilyatu l Muttakin* pp 48-50

<sup>4</sup> See chapter on Birth

<sup>5</sup> The *sirat* is the bridge across hell which according to the traditions is thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword's edge (Steingass Persian English Dictionary)

## CHAPTER XXIV

### FOODS

THERE is a notable lack of conversation at an ordinary Iranian meal for eating is the business at hand and slight attention is given to anything else. Until very recent years, all except a few of the elite spread their cloth upon the floor and ate with their fingers, and most of the common people have not yet departed from these customs. The villagers for the most part do not spread a cloth but use a large, round, copper tray, around which the family sit and eat out of a common bowl. There is precedent for this custom in the traditions, for Majlisi writes<sup>1</sup> that a person should eat with only the right hand, unless that hand be disabled, and he should sit on his two knees, because Muhammad sat at meat that way with the humility of a slave. And Muhammad said "In the name of God" and ate with three or four fingers, and did not lean to the right or left, but sat up straight.

In the same connection it is related that the Imam Hasan said that there are twelve rules of eating to be observed. The first four are *necessary*, namely, to know that God is the Provider, to be satisfied with what He has provided, to say "In the name of God" when beginning to eat, and to say "To God be thanks" when you finish. The next four are *customary*, and it is well to observe them, though they are not required to wash the hands before eating to sit at the left of the table, to eat with three fingers, and to lick the fingers after eating. The last four are rules of particular politeness to eat out of the dish that is immediately in front of you and out of your own side of the dish, to take small pieces, to chew the food well, and not to gaze at the others at the table with you. These twelve rules form the traditional basis for the table manners of the majority of the people.

Ali is said to have given his son Hasan a number of rules for eating, which, "if he followed them, would enable him to escape the doctors" not to eat until he was very hungry,

to leave the table before he was quite satisfied, and to chew his food until it became soft

There are a number of prohibitions in regard to foods and these have to do mainly with the question of ceremonial uncleanness. In the Koran it is written,<sup>2</sup> "But that which dieth of itself, and blood and swine's flesh, and that over which any other name than that of God hath been invoked is forbidden to you. But he who shall partake of them by constraint, without lust or wilfulness no sin shall be upon him." Animals which are to be used for food must be killed in such a way that all the blood flows from the body for blood itself is regarded as unclean.

Should an animal be wounded by an arrow with an iron point, it should be killed immediately and the flesh will be good. If it should have been killed with the arrow the flesh may be eaten on the condition that "In the name of God" was said when the arrow was shot. The same restriction holds good for the sword or the spear.

A fish should be brought out of the water alive else it is forbidden. Some say that if a Muslim brings a fish out dead it is good to eat. Others say that any fish that is caught by an unbeliever is forbidden, but they add that if it is brought out alive and a Muslim gets his hands on it, then it may be eaten. If a fish jumps out of the water onto the land and is caught, it may be eaten but if it dies it is forbidden. Fish which are caught on Friday should not be eaten unless they came out of the water alive.

The Prophet told Ali that he should eat some salt at the beginning and at the end of each meal, because God would remove from the person who did this the possibility of seventy-two kinds of calamity, the least of which would be insanity, cancer and leprosy. It is said that God revealed to Moses the power of salt and told him to command his people to eat salt before and after meals, and should anyone who obeyed this command become ill, then he should not be held responsible.

Many believe that if a little vinegar is drunk at the beginning of the meal the intelligence will be increased.

Sour foods should not be eaten when one has a cold or the illness will become worse. The soured milk which is so widely used is often spoken of as "white sour," and when restrictions in sour foods are made, the question frequently arises as to whether they include the "white sour."

The old idea that in their very nature foods are either "warm" or "cold" exerts a strong influence in diet. Those which are regarded as "warm" should be eaten when one has a cold. "Cold" foods, on the other hand, are good for the blood and the liver, but "very cold" foods are not good for the bones.

The milk of the sheep is "warm." Its flesh, as well as that of the camel, the hen, the duck, the dove, the partridge and the turkey hen, is "warm." But cow's milk is "cold," and the flesh of the cow, or the rooster, or the turkey cock, or the fish, is "cold." Most nuts are "warm," and fruits and vegetables are about equally divided. While cow's milk is "cold," ice cream is "warm."

Diseases are also "warm" or "cold." Pneumonia is "warm" and malaria is "cold." Measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough and smallpox are at first "cold," but they become "warm." Each and every disease falls into one of these classes, and according as the disease is "warm" or "cold" the opposite food should be eaten. For example, tuberculosis is "warm," and therefore the person so afflicted should not eat eggs, for they also are "warm."

The milk of a mother of a boy baby is "warm," while that of a mother of a girl baby is "cold." The latter is used in making soothing poultices and it is put into the ear to cure earache and when it is mixed with the powdered berries of the wild barberry it is believed to reduce inflammation.

Many foods are prepared on particular days in memory of a saint, or of some important event. Each is good for a special purpose. Some are for merit, some for healing, some for good fortune, some for removing an evil influence and some are for the fulfilment of a vow. A porridge that is made of crushed wheat, meat, grease and spices and which is called *halim* and *harisa* is cooked upon the day of Fatima's death. Also there is a sweet that is called *shula zard*, which may be cooked upon the day of the death of any of the household of Muhammad, but usually it is prepared on the day of the death of Hasan. It is made yellow, *zard*, with saffron and tumeric, because his death was called a "yellow death." Another sweet, *halva*, is cooked for merit, especially for the dead. Ordinarily they make this in memory of Husain in the month of Muharram, but they may prepare it "for Abu al Fazl."

at any time. Much of it is given away, for in so doing lies much of the merit.

There is also a porridge that they call *shula kalamkar*, which is for healing. It is made from lentils and spinach which were bought with money which had been begged in the streets. The porridge of Abu Darda has already been mentioned.<sup>3</sup> The *ash-i bibi shamba* is cooked to remove the influence of the evil eye from those who are named "Bibi," which marks them as descendants of the Prophet. But no man may see this *ash*, or gruel, nor should it be allowed out under the sky lest it turn to blood. Sometimes it is cooked when a woman or a family have some very special desire. There should be seven virgins present to eat it with the other women. If the desire is not obtained at once, it may be cooked on three different days.

Fish should be eaten the night before the new year to cleanse one from sin. Camel's flesh also serves this same purpose. And a *pilau* that contains *reshki* (noodles) should be eaten on the second night of the New Year, so that one's employment will be prolonged like the noodles. And on the third night the favourite national dish of rice and meat sauce *pilau*, should be prepared again, but this time containing greens of some kind, so that one's work may remain fresh and interesting.

#### NOIFS

<sup>1</sup> Majlisi *Hilyat ul Muttakin* pp 16 17

Koran Sura 2 168 For further restrictions see Sura 5 1 4 and 6 118 121

<sup>3</sup> See the Index Abu Darda

## CHAPTER XXV

### DIVINATION AND EXORCISM

FOR hundreds of years the Iranians have made use of divination. When confronted with a crisis in their affairs they instinctively turn to some special means of determining the unknown, and some of the many practices that are common among them have been in use from ancient times.

According to the printed manuals there are three chief forms of divination: *raml*, "geomancy", *istikhara*, "bibliomancy", and *fal*, "augury".

*Raml* is the science of reading the future by means of the positions taken by pebbles which have been thrown upon the ground. Or, as otherwise defined, "It is the art of prognosticating from lines drawn upon the sand." It is said that Gabriel instructed Daniel in this art, and that it has been made known only to the prophets and the Imams. But *raml* in Iran has been developed beyond these primitive forms. It has long been carried on with the astrolabe and with dice, and many there are who are neither prophets nor Imams, but only dervishes or *akhuns* (theological students), who are proficient in the science.

There are two forms of this geomancy that are still common in Iran, the one of Daniel and the other of the Imam Ja'far Sadik. The former is accomplished with four brass dice that are strung upon a wire and that are used with an astrolabe. The second is worked with wooden dice, which have the four written letters of the word *abjad* (a, b, j, d), written on four of the faces of the die. The die is thrown three times and each time the letter on top is noted down. After the third throw that particular sequence of letters is looked up in the book on *raml*, and the result is worked out by the geomancer. In both forms the book is consulted. It is said that the *raml* of the Imam has never commanded a great deal of confidence, but that the people had so much confidence in the *raml* of Daniel, and it was used to such an extent in gambling, that about the year 1925 the Government forbade its practice.

But it is still secretly performed Recently the chief wife of a prominent man visited Meshed Her husband had three wives, but just previous to her journey he had divorced one of them While in Meshed the lady consulted the geomancer, it was said, to ascertain whether her husband would be taking another wife

The purpose of the *istikhara*, or bibliomancy, is to learn the immediate expediency of performing a contemplated act It is highly regarded by all classes and is given considerable space in many of the popular books of religious instruction<sup>1</sup> It is related that the Prophet said that if a person dutifully performs the *istikhara* he need never suffer loss nor experience sorrow It is done with the Koran<sup>2</sup> and the *tasbeeh*, or rosary With the Koran its performance is limited to particular days and hours, and it is done only by those who specialize in divination, but with the rosary it may be done at any time and by anyone There are several simple ways of accomplishing it with the rosary one of these is to take hold of the beads anywhere and count them by twos until you reach the elongated bead, which is called the "sheikh" if an odd bead remains, the omen is good, but if they come out even it is bad, another way is to close the eyes take hold of the rosary anywhere and count by threes if one remains the sign is good, if two it is fair, but if they come out even it is very bad indeed But in all forms of *raml* and *istikhara*, before performing the rite, a person should definitely decide on his desire and keep it in his mind This desire is called the *niyat*

Other methods of *istikhara* bear the name of prophets or Imams, and that which goes by Muhammad's own name is done as follows the eyes are closed, the desire is silently recalled and the rosary is taken in the left hand As it hangs in a loop it is grasped with the right hand and the beads are counted, saying *if'al* (to be) and *la taf'al* (not to be) till the long bead is reached If the last count is "to be" the omen is good, but if it is "not to be" then obviously it is bad

The *istikhara* of Fatima is performed by placing the right elbow on the right knee, while the right hand holds the rosary by the long bead It is then caught near the lower part of the loop and brought up so as to be held at a second place by the right hand, thus forming two loops The left hand is held under the loops, just touching the longer one



As the *niyat*, or desire, is kept in mind the loops are watched, if they move the slightest bit it is a good sign, but if they remain quiet it is bad

The *istikhara* of the Imam Rida is called the "eight and eight," for he was the eighth Imam according to the Twelvers. The rosary is taken at any place and the beads are counted by groups of eight. Each number has its meaning, *i.e.* one, three, five and seven are good, two and four are bad, while six is fairly good and eight is fairly bad. So if five beads remain the omen is a good one, as is true also of three or seven.

The "forty-one" is called the *istikhara* of Joseph. It is done by counting off forty one beads from the "sheikh." This point is then held by the little finger, and the space between it and the long bead is taken hold of in two places by the thumb and first finger of each hand. There are now three divisions of the rosary, and the beads of each division are counted by twos. If each should have one odd bead it is an exceedingly good sign, if the odd bead is only in the division next to the "sheikh" the sign is still good, if it is with the middle division only, the significance is neither good nor bad, but if the third division only has the odd bead, then the omen is bad.

The name of the Imam Ja'far Sadik is attached to the *istikhara* of "nine and nine," although he was the sixth Imam. It is not done with the rosary and might better be called a form of *fal*. Its origin is based on this story. At one time the Imam was on a ship, which had among its passengers a considerable number of Muslim pilgrims, who were on their way to Mecca. A terrific storm arose, so that it appeared to be necessary to throw some of the passengers overboard. There were Jews also aboard. The Imam took charge, and arranging the passengers in rows, he counted off every ninth person to be thrown overboard. But it so happened that every ninth one was a Jew. The "nine and nine" is now done by drawing a small circle with an unknown number of lines radiating from it, these lines are counted off by nines, and each ninth one is checked. The counting continues on around until nine falls upon a line that has already been checked off, and those which remain are then counted by twos in the usual way and similarly interpreted.

*Fal*, or augury, is used especially to determine the character

of the progress of an undertaking and its probable outcome, and is the most common form of divination. Professional "takers of the omens" are numerous, for anyone may become adept, since there are practically no limitations of time or place. It is not so highly regarded as *istikhara*, though among the common people there is apt to be no distinction made. Some claim that it may be done with the Koran, but others say that this is forbidden.<sup>4</sup> The works of the most popular poets, usually Hafiz or Saadi, are commonly used for *fal*, but it is not restricted to mere bibliomancy, for it may be performed with a variety of articles and in as many ways and may be done by an individual in the seclusion of his room or practised openly in the streets.

In this case also the names of the great are given to the different methods of performance, several of which are called for Fatima. Of these one of the simplest is known as the *fal* of the hand. The little finger of the right hand is placed on the tip of the middle finger of the left hand, with two spans the right thumb should reach approximately the inside of the elbow, then one span is taken back to the wrist and another to the elbow again, and two more are taken back to the middle finger. If the little finger then falls slightly beyond the tip of the middle finger it is a good sign, but if it falls short or even with it, it is bad.

Another form which bears the name of Fatima because she is said to have made use of it is the *fal* of the peas. When employing this method of augury fifty three peas are put into a sieve. They are first divided into two piles, these two piles are subdivided and so on until one, two or three peas only remain in each of the several piles. All of this has been done with closed eyes. When the diviner opens his eyes, he studies the positions of the peas and gives his client an answer. Women also often sit in the street and perform this divination for small fees.

The *fal* of the corner is ascribed to the Imam Ja'far Sadik. To divine the outcome of some undertaking, a person will secrete himself in the corner of his neighbour's courtyard, or upon the wall surrounding it, and he will listen to the conversation. If what he hears is wholesome in content and pleasant in spirit the omen is good, but if there is complaining or sorrow or quarrelling it is unfavourable. A similar result may be obtained by sitting outside one's door onto the

street, and noting the character of the first conversation which comes to the ear

The *fal* that is named for Shimar, the hated general who killed Husain at Kerbala, is exceedingly simple and is sometimes called the *kharr*, *shar*, or the "good, bad" It is like the schoolgirls' game with daisies, "He loves me, he loves me not" The usual method is to draw a circle or square upon the ground, then to scratch as many lines within it as there is room, and finally to tell them off with *kharr*, "good," *shar*, "bad," until they are all told off If the last one is *kharr*, it is good, and if *shar*, bad Thus one learns the fate of his *nyat*, or desire This is sometimes performed by illiterate women upon graves, to determine the condition of the one buried beneath

The divination of the match is only for the most gullible, and yet according to the statement of one who formerly practised it many people resort to it Three matches are wrapped up, each in a separate strip of cloth They are put under some object for a moment then brought out and unrolled one by one If the match falls from the cloth it is a good sign, but if caught in the fold it is otherwise The simple trick of allowing the end of the cloth next to you to be longer and to lap over as the match is rolled toward you frees the match readily when it is unrolled, and so a good omen can be given at will

Divination with alum is employed usually to apprehend an evil doer particularly anyone who has cast a spell Alum is burned, and as it sizzles careful attention is given to the shape it takes for in the strange mass there may be the likeness of the face or of the body of the one whom they wish to discover

Similarly eggs may be used to discover a thief An egg is pressed on the ends as the name of every suspect is mentioned, and at the name of the guilty one it will break

Much importance is given to ascertaining the proper time to do particular things, *e g*, putting on new clothes, arranging for a wedding starting on a journey, moving into a new house, or undertaking any special piece of work They carefully "take the hour" for doing these things, and so much faith is shown in this rite that a book called the "Book of Hours" has been written to cover all possible exigencies

Twitchings of the body are regarded as indicative of future happenings In many of the books on magic there are

lengthy explanations of the meaning of a twitch, generally according to its location. The twitching of the right side of the nose means that one will hear good news, but if it be of the upper lip, he will fall ill or have trouble. For almost every detail of the parts of the body a meaning has been attached.

Recognized signs in nature may deter a person from starting on a journey. These are well known by all classes of people, and most of them are mentioned in the manuals on divination. If one should see a crow flying to the right, or a dog carrying its tail up, or an old woman with white hair approaching, it would be best for him to delay starting. If a person sneezes or an owl hoots beware! But if one repeats the prayer, "*This fear which I find in my heart, I give to God*" he may go on in safety.

The note of the "little owl" is at all times significant. If it makes its mournful note when it is perched upon a house, sorrow or calamity will come to that home but if it makes its pleasant note, its "laugh" as it is called, joy and prosperity will follow.

If a dog howls at night it is a sign that someone will die. To see a monkey on New Year's Day brings good fortune throughout the year. It is good to see a white horse but it is dangerous to ride a horse that has two white feet, especially if one of these is the right front foot.

The science of *jafar* is another means of divination. As popularly understood it is a system of numbers and diagrams and is the key to all knowledge. It is called the perfect science, and by some it is said to have been originated by the Imam Husain, but others attribute it to Ali.<sup>5</sup> It was written in the first place on a cow's skin, that was either forty or seventy cubits long, but the book is now in the possession of the "Hidden Imam," though some say it has been lost. Only the Imams are supposed to understand this science, and yet the religious books contain complete directions for performing divination by it, for by means of it everything that is past, present or future can be known.

One of the most ancient forms of divination has to do with the signs of the zodiac, and is usually called the *fal* of the fairies. The name of the one who desires information is first written down, then the numerical value of the letters comprising his name are added. A similar sum is made of the values of the

letters in the name of his mother, and if the mother's name is not known the name of Eve may be substituted. The two sums are then added and the total is divided by twelve, the number of signs of the zodiac, and whatever the remainder may be indicates the sign of the zodiac that has to do with the matter in question. In the manuals all necessary knowledge concerning each sign is given, so the diviner readily locates the sign desired and finds the information wanted.

As an example of this, we may take a man whose name is Hu s a i n. The letters in this name have the numerical values of 8 60 10 50, or a total of 128. His mother's name is Za h r a (7 5 200 1), with a total of 213. These totals are added to make 341, which is divided by twelve, the number of the signs of the zodiac, and there is a remainder of 5, which indicates the number of the sign desired, i.e. the sign of the Lion.

### EXORCISM

The exorcist is believed to be able to do everything. The common people have remarkable confidence in him and consult him on all sorts of occasions, but for the most part in cases of illness. When a cold lingers and seems to have settled in some part of the body, the sufferer will visit an exorcist to get him to dispel it. The exorcist will pound six nails into the wall and will tie a string to each one. He then declares that the cold will leave and that the nails will remain in the wall until the patient has completely recovered. The price for this service is two *rials*, or about twenty cents.

The *nazh band* or the nerve binder, is an exorcist who might be called a specialist since he limits his cases to fevers. His usual equipment is a reed and some silk thread. When his services are requested he will wrap some of the thread around the reed, then he will blow a prayer into the reed, and the fever is supposed to go. He may also exorcize neuralgia with a knife. He will draw the knife slowly across the spot where the pain is located and will say "In the name of (*names of different prophets*) be gone!" and the neuralgia will be cured. The extravagant statement was made by an Iranian that every man, woman and child in the country believes in the *nazh band*.

An affection of the eyeball is removed in the following manner. Seven grains of rice, a bowl of water and a Koran

are made ready at sunset on Saturday Sura 94 is read seven times, and at the end of each reading one grain of rice is dropped into the water This also is considered to be an unfailing remedy

Or when a child has smallpox and a pustule has formed on the eyeball, it is exorcized by the use of a string that no tooth has touched and that has been twisted by a girl of no more than nine years of age Seven knots are tied in the string and the Sura "Kaf" is read This sura has seven *kafs* and at each one a knot is opened When all seven are open the sura is read seven times more, and the string is blown upon after each reading When the readings have been completed, the string is held so as to hang down before the affected eye—and the pustule disappears

For severe pain in any part of the body an exorcist will write on the wall the four Arabic characters, ain (ع), ta (ط) sad (س), and fa (ف) As each of these has an open space that resembles that in the English "e," he will drive a nail first into the space in *ain* and he will ask the patient if the pain is gone If not he will drive a nail into the similar space in the second letter, and so he will continue It is said that the most stubborn pain will leave entirely at the fourth nail

To exorcize fevers, sometimes wild rue seeds are burned over hot coals, and the smoke is allowed to go under the bed clothes and around the body of the patient While this is being done an incantation concerning the seed is repeated

When a young girl is growing very rapidly she may be taken to an exorcist He has her stand against the wall, and he pounds a nail into the wall at the point of her height then he says "May she grow no taller" and as long as the nail remains in the wall she will grow no more

Many practices in exorcism are to drive out the spell of the evil eye, and jinn are driven out by reading or reciting the Koran with the use of the magic square which is composed of sixteen smaller squares in which numbers have been written in such a way that in all directions the sums are the same, as described in the chapter on "Talismans"

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The *Miftah al Jinan* devotes thirty pages to this subject

<sup>2</sup> Cf chapter on "The Koran"

<sup>3</sup> It is sometimes called the *sheikhak*, or 'little sheikh, and each of the three irregular beads that divide the rosary into three sections may be called *murghal* or 'little chicken'

<sup>4</sup> Cf chapter on The Koran

<sup>5</sup> Cf article in the *Encyclopædia of Islam* on *Djafir* by Professor D B Macdonald







THE VILLAGE WOMAN'S CHAIN OF CHARMS  
See opposite page

## CHAPTER XXVI

### TALISMANS AND SIGNS

THE word *tahsm*, from which comes our word talisman, is used to include almost all charms and amulets also those which are popularly known as "prayers" The word *ta'wid* which is defined as charm, amulet, etc., is found in the literature, but it is seldom used in conversation Ordinarily it refers to the four short suras that are called the 'Four Declarations' or 'A refuge with God,'<sup>1</sup>

The very general use of talismans is evident from the numbers of them that one sees worn by the people, and in addition to those that are visible there are many others which are worn under the clothing In one mountain village, where city dwellers go for vacations, every woman and child wears at least one charm, and many of the men have "prayers" bound upon their arms This village with its charm wearing population is typical of most of the Iranian villages In the cities also, barring some of the educated class perhaps, the majority of the people still wear charms These may be worn on the outside or tucked away in the clothing Most people wear rings with agate or turquoise sets, or silver rings with talismans cut into them and a few people, especially men wear iron rings

In other chapters references have been made to charms which were directly related to the subject at hand but besides these there are many others, some of which will be mentioned here The chain of charms that is commonly worn by village women over one shoulder, crosses the chest and hangs over the other arm From the lowest point hangs the 'prayer' which is much like those that are bound on the arms It consists of a small case of cloth velvet or leather, and this contains a long strip of paper upon which is written a sura from the Koran, in whole or in part then some of the names of God also letters of the alphabet in conventional form, a variety of talismanic signs and perhaps a curse upon unbelievers There will also be bound up with this some earth brought from Mecca or from Kerbala, a salt crystal, a needle

and possibly a lion's whisker. Sometimes the chain contains only such a "prayer" and a magic ring to hold the husband's love, but usually it is a much more elaborate affair. Among the other articles which may be fastened to it are a rooster's spur, and a claw from an eagle or a panther. Any of these will usually be mounted in silver, and they are worn with the idea that they give health, strength and courage. For protection against the bites of animals or the stings of insects, a bead of serpentine will be included. Also an agate bead has its place, for the sake of merit, but if there are white rings visible in the stone it may be used to cure colic. An amber bead may be on the chain to cure attacks of jaundice and besides these there may be a blue china bead, a grey agate bead, a piece of deer's horn and a cowry shell—all to ward off the glance of the evil eye. Or for the same purpose there may be a piece of onyx, which simulates an eye and will be set in silver. And very likely the dried "sacrificed eye" will be seen dangling from an upper corner of the prayer case. And for the purpose of keeping the affection of the husband, there will appear a steel magnet, several rings cut with magical formulæ, a small iron bar and a piece of gold stone. For this same important object there may also be the "holy seed," and some sort of a bangle with the heads of a man and a woman scratched upon it. To assuage grief there may be an ebony bead for sorrow is believed to pass into it so that instead of breaking the heart it cracks the bead. Some say it also makes difficult tasks easy. A little silver lock, or two silver almonds hung together, will bind the tongues of those who might be disposed to slander and they will also bind together the love of husband and wife. And on a really comprehensive chain there will be seeds of Job's tears for love and an entire seed pod of the wild rue for good fortune. There is almost certainly a minute silver box or a "jinn shoe" to hold some special little "prayer," and a tiny framed picture of Ali, or of the Imam Rida, will show that the wearer is a loyal Shi'ite Muhammadan.

*Metals*—Talismans are cut in metals. Iron and silver are generally used, but brass and copper are not uncommon. Occasionally one will see a special charm against the *div*, in which case the pictures of these demons will appear on a brass disc, but the most usual custom is to have magical formulæ cut on rings of silver, copper, brass or iron.

*Stone* — Talismans to keep plague and pestilence from entering a city will be cut in stone and embedded in the pillars of the city gates <sup>2</sup>

*Bones* — Skulls of horses, donkeys or sheep are used to keep away from good fruit bearing trees any evil that might come from a glance of envy or admiration. These skulls may be seen wedged between the branches. The use of the donkey's skull 'to bind the heavens' has already been mentioned, and the value of the wolf's knee cap and 'the doll' has been stated <sup>3</sup>. Sometimes the ankle bone of a wolf may be seen tied to a child's arm to make him brave.

*Seeds* — The wild rue has been mentioned throughout the work and reference has been made to Job's tears and to the "holy seed". It may be added that the horned seed pods of the water oak are often used by pregnant women. The water in which two of these seeds have been soaked is drunk by them to insure easy delivery. Some of the water oak seeds are brownish in colour and some are black, the brown ones may be used to ward off the evil eye.

*Eggs* — Wide use is made of the egg in birth ceremonies. Sometimes eggs are boiled and kept until the contents become dry and hard and often the shell is emptied and verses from the Koran will be written upon the shell and often the name of God will appear in some beautiful conventional pattern.

*Shells* — The cowry shell, as has been mentioned is effective against the evil eye. One of the gastropods, a slender univalve, is put into lemon juice and this liquid is used to cure warts. Small white shells are strung upon strings and allowed to hang down the back. Their use is to cure headache and to overcome witchcraft.

*Amber* — On almost every chain and bracelet that is made up of talismanic beads and other objects there will be seen a bead of amber. It is regarded as a cure for jaundice. Also the ash of burned amber is good to rub upon sore eyes. And if amber is ground into a powder and eaten, it will strengthen a weak heart and will induce sweating.

*Sacred Earth* — The very earth taken from shrines carries with it special blessing, and is made into rosaries and prayer tablets, but the earth which is taken from the tomb of Husain, at Kerbala, is the most potent because it has been mixed with his blood. The power of this earth does not diminish as does that of earth that is taken from other sacred

places, and it is said that in cases where there is too much rainfall if some of this earth from Kerbala is put upon the roof the rain is sure to stop. It is also eaten at times to cure particular ills.

In addition to the recognized manuals that give instruction for the preparation of talismans,<sup>4</sup> there is a small handbook that is much in demand. It is called the *Diya al Uyun*, the "Light of Eyes," and while it comprises only sixteen pages, yet they are full of different forms of talismans, with directions for divination, and with the accompanying verses from the Koran and a list of the names of the prophets.

*Signs*—Several signs are repeatedly used in magical formulæ. Both the circle and the square appear frequently on talismans of metal or of stone and at times the triangle, the star, the cross and the swastika will be seen. In the manuals for talismanic instruction there are to be found elaborate designs which make use of all of these signs. The circle denotes love and permanence, for it suggests having been bound together. Many talismans are round, with concentric circles, and the intervening spaces are filled with the names of prophets, the letters being arranged conventionally or in magical formulæ. So also magic prayers are written in circles upon cloth. A striking example of this form of talisman is called the "Fortress of Ya Sin." This sura is written upon a large square of cloth the plain portion in the centre of the circle is cut away, and the person who desires to avail himself of the protection of this fortress will crawl through the hole. He will then be surrounded with magical power and will be kept from all danger. So also a circle is drawn about the bowl that is employed in crystal gazing. And when anyone makes preparation to summon the jinn, his first act is to draw a circle about himself. A circle is drawn around the room in which a child is born, and separate ones are drawn around the baby and the mother. And when they blow the breath to keep away the jinn they usually blow in circles. When on a journey a person is obliged to stop in some unsheltered spot, if he draws a circle about him and says the Throne Verse, he may lie down and sleep in peace and safety from thieves, as well as from prowling or savage animals.

There is a story told of some shepherds who were taken with a sudden desire to make the pilgrimage to Kerbala.

They thought the journey would take them from their flock for the space of a few days, so they left their sheep on the desert, after they had drawn a circle about them and had repeated the Throne Verse. Their pilgrimage, however, lasted three months, but when they returned the sheep were just where they had left them and in the same good condition !

Moreover a man, who in his youth was unsettled in his mind in regard to various religious matters, performed several of the ceremonies which are said to lead to knowledge and piety. In each case, according to his own story, he went to a secluded spot, and there first of all he drew a circle about himself.

The square symbolizes both hatred and protection. If a person has an enemy whom he believes is trying to injure him, he is likely to draw a square upon a piece of paper and write the enemy's name within it, or better still, he will mould a cube of soft mud and write the name on one of the faces. The time for doing this must be determined by divination. He then buries it or throws it into a stream or a well, at the same time asking the aid of God, or of the four great angels, Gabriel, Mika'il, Izrafil and Azra'il. The enemy will die, or at least he will cease to trouble him.

In making protective talismans the square is also much used. Verse 38 of the sura "Ya Sin" is written within a magic square at sunset and kept at hand. No danger from illness, fierce animals, fire or water will come near the wearer. In a similar way the magic square is used on charms, particularly on silver rings. One reason for its importance is that it is stated by those who claim to know the secrets connected with it that very few people can make it correctly. The information that is given here in regard to it was provided by a dervish who had used it for years as his stock in-trade when he was "writing prayers" for afflicted and troubled people. The square which he used as the pattern or basic idea for sixteen others, each of which dealt with a particular subject, included sixteen smaller squares. Into these he placed the numerical values of the letters for the word *buduh*.<sup>5</sup> This he did in such a way that the three sums of them, when taken horizontally, vertically and diagonally, would be the same. He remarked that there was enough mischief wrought by this square alone to fill a whole volume.

Sometimes the numerical values (*abjad*) for the various names of God will be put into the triangle, the circle, or the square and used as talismans. The values of the word *buduh* are written upon the points of the star for talismans. Similarly the cross, the swastika, dots and combinations of lines and letters are all employed, apparently indiscriminately, in the numerous long prayers that are enclosed in cases to be worn upon the person.

The hand is a symbol that is much in evidence during the month of Muharram. It commemorates the death of Abbas, whose hand was cut off when he was carrying water to a wounded son of Husain at the battle of Kerbala. The small silver hand which is worn by small boys in the month of Muharram is in memory of this event, and it is an acknowledgment of the wearer's servitude to Abbas.

The horseshoe is used to avert the power of the evil eye. At the present day they may be seen nailed to the rear of motor trucks, or fastened upon the doorsteps of shops. In the latter case the hope is that no one will pass out without leaving money.

Signboards with the names of the "Five" are supposed to furnish special protection to shops. There are also various kinds of printed sheets to be seen upon the walls of garage offices and other places of business, which are intended to keep these establishments under the protection of the Imams.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Suras 109 112 113 and 114

There is such a talisman at the Sar Āb Gate in Meshed which was cut many years ago and most of the characters are now illegible.

<sup>2</sup> See under skull knee cap and doll in the Index

<sup>3</sup> Among these books are the *Asrar i Ghasimi* by Kashifi the *Majma al Da wat* the *Jam al Da wat* the *Majma al Fanun* and the *Mifta al Jinan*. There is an edition of the Koran that was especially prepared for this purpose by the Rukn i Dawla in Teheran. The first chapter is particularly useful.

<sup>4</sup> See Buduh in the Index

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